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THE HUMANITY OF GOD: KARL BARTH AND  
CONTEMPORARY RADICAL THEOLOGY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Divinity  
University of Glasgow  
Glasgow, Scotland

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Department of Systematic Theology

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by  
Ronald Douglas McConnell  
June, 1968

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## PREFACE

The subject title, "The Humanity of God," suggests the content and direction of the thesis. It will research that part of Karl Barth's thought that deals with Christology and that most nearly relates to the contemporary concerns of theology. In Barth, this is reflected in what he calls a new direction or a change of direction from his earlier emphasis. It is his most recent position and could be considered the conclusions he has reached as to his own theological work over the past fifty years. While Barth's christological position can be regarded as a recent one, because Christology is central for all of his theology, it touches everything he has written and is given a complete discussion in the Church Dogmatics. The thesis will evaluate this discussion in the light of contemporary theology.

The terminology used by Barth for his recent emphasis is die menschlichkeit Gottes, "the humanity of God." Because it concerns itself with the relating of God to man, it has an important affinity with contemporary theological interest in the doctrines of man and society and the pointing toward a new theology of the Holy Spirit. The position taken by the thesis is that Barth's contribution in the area of Christology provides the natural and needful foundation and heritage upon



which the new theological quest will be based. It is possible to say that the present trends in theology would not be possible without the work of Karl Barth and that of his major contemporaries, particularly Emil Brunner, Rudolf Karl Bultmann, and in America, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Important to the present discussion is also the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. These men, and of course many more, have made invaluable and major contributions to the future of theology. Some of them will be reflected in the thesis, but the major emphasis will be upon Karl Barth's role in shaping contemporary theological trends.

The research of the thesis will attempt to critically review the theology of Karl Barth, with a special view toward Christology, in terms of both strength and weakness. It will limit its attention to those areas of his work that are most important to contemporary theological interest.

The format of the thesis has followed the style and direction of Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Third Edition, Revised (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967) and A Manual of Style (11th ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949). An effort has been made to avoid the use of the personal pronoun "we" except where clarity made its use advisable when interpreting Barth. The thesis has generally followed the modern propensity toward limiting both the amount of

punctuation and the use of capitals.

I would like to express sincere appreciation to Professor Ian Henderson for the kindness and skill of his supervision. His counsel in the area of Barth's theology has contributed greatly to the development of my own thought. Acknowledgment is also given to Professors John Macquarrie and Ronald Gregor Smith for their influence and assistance in the course of my studies. Finally, I wish to add a personal tribute of respect to the life and work of Karl Barth. It is impossible to become as deeply involved in the genius of Karl Barth's theology as the thesis has made possible and not be permanently influenced. Barth's massive contribution will continue to make its impact upon theology for years to come and will continually be reassessed. Its influence is a major factor in all Protestant thought, and I acknowledge with appreciation its influence upon my own thinking.

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## CHAPTER I

### EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Theology in the nineteenth century witnessed the triumph of Protestant liberalism. It resulted from the almost unchallenged influence of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and was the religious expression of the self-confidence of the absolute man of that period. Karl Barth's examination and estimate of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries make it possible to see him against this background and to understand and better evaluate his views. Barth, in fact, goes beyond the Enlightenment for the sources of nineteenth-century theology. He sees a historical connection between the sixteenth-century Renaissance and the eighteenth century and views the Enlightenment as a revival of the humanistic ideal which dominated the Renaissance. "The idea of humanism," says Barth, "was that the perfect life consisted in the complete autarchy of rational man in a rational world on the basis of the existence and dominion of a Deity guaranteeing this association and thus too man's complete autarchy."<sup>1</sup> This humanism, which had been thrust aside by

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, From Rousseau to Ritschl, trans. by Brian Cozens (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1959), p. 54.

the Reformation and the upheavals which followed it, was the predicate mentality of the Enlightenment and a central factor behind the optimism of evangelical theology in the nineteenth century.

The theology of Karl Barth represents the first major challenge to this theology in well over a century. He is the first theologian to successfully question the aims of an optimistic-idealistic liberalism since the Enlightenment. There have been other protests, but none with the influence and repercussions of Barth's theology. His work can only be regarded in its initial efforts as a reaction. It is a determined revolt against the very foundations of 200 years of theology. Herein is Karl Barth's great importance and the basis upon which his work is to be judged.

Gabriel Vahanian is probably closest to understanding Barth's original intent when he recognizes that as a theologian in the Reformation tradition, Barth's theology is essentially a corrective one. He says, "Like a teacher, it attempts to inform and transform by confronting the student, not by indoctrinating him."<sup>1</sup> This characteristic is especially noticeable in the earlier writings of Barth. His theology takes on greater coherence and consistency in the later volumes

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church, trans., with an Introduction by Gabriel Vahanian (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), p. 12.

of the Dogmatics, but even here Barth remains more concerned with the proper object of truth than with an orderly presentation of doctrine.

The theology of Karl Barth is the work of a man who has wrestled with the entire history of Christian thought and is therefore a theology which comes to grips with the questions and problems from the history of philosophical and scientific thought although always from the sole basis of the authoritative Word by which Barth finds the criteria to judge all of theology. Its greatest characteristic is therefore to recognize that the unique and proper concern for theology is always something more than the sum total of all human thought and history. It is a theology that respects the reality of God as the genuine source for its direction.

Barth saw modern Christianity as reading the New Testament backwards,<sup>1</sup> and, instead of taking the way from God to man and then from man to God, it had reversed the gospel of election and grace and had sought to make a path from human experience and consciousness to God. It is this reversal that Barth set himself to change but in such a way as to keep the relationship between God and man a vital factor. Professor Torrance credits Barth with a continuing concern for man's total existence and says this accounts for his interest in

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. by Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. 286. Hereafter cited as Word of God.

preaching and theological activity itself. Torrance sees this as requiring for Barth on the one hand,

achieving distance, separation, a boundary line, as it were, between Christianity and the Church's involvement in the world, in order that the Gospel may be heard as Gospel, but on the other hand, it involves concrete involvement in the world and in the times in which the preacher or theologian lives, that he may bring the Gospel to bear upon the world in all the power of its newness from God to men.<sup>1</sup>

This characteristic is both the greatest contribution of Barthian theology and the area where it is most vulnerable to criticism. It would not be fair to say that Barth's theology is detached from history. It would be more accurate to say that it is distinct from history, and this is enough to open the doors for criticism both constructive and negative. It will be the purpose of the thesis to determine where such criticism can serve a constructive end, and at other times to defend Barth's theology from criticism which either fails to appreciate his positive basis or is itself directed from a false premise.

Barth reveals the framework from which his theological revolt is to be understood in his attitude toward theology in the nineteenth century. One of the most important books he has written is From Rousseau to Ritschl,<sup>2</sup> in which he critically

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas F. Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931 (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1962), p. 47. Hereafter cited as Karl Barth.

<sup>2</sup>A translation of eleven chapters of Die protestantische theologie im 19 Jahrhundert. Barth includes figures from the eighteenth century in this book, and one of the most brilliant essays written on this period is included--"Man in the Eighteenth Century."

examines that inclusive period of philosophy and theology. Four dominant themes emerge in Barth's criticism and evaluation, all of which have their historical antecedents in the personalities and thought that Barth reviews from Rousseau to Ritschl. He is, first of all, compelled to reject the image of the absolute man who is seen as self-confident and self-sufficient, and one whose self-assertion prevented him from finding the living God of the revelation in Christ. Secondly, Barth criticizes the immanentism of the period with its turning to religious consciousness as the seat of authority. In doing so, says Barth, it loses the sovereign God who confronts man as Lord. The third characteristic of Barth's criticism has to do with the historical element of the Christian faith which Barth believes has been overly emphasized during the nineteenth century. While expressing appreciation for the historical and exegetical studies of this theology, he objects that through these mediums Jesus Christ is reduced to a mere historical phenomenon. Finally, Barth sees an exaggerated concern for the relating of the Christian message to the world and believes this leads to a loss of authority.

#### The Image of the Absolute Man

The attempt of theology to make man absolute is a central issue in Barth's confrontation with nineteenth century theology. He sees it as an attempt to create a system of life based upon the belief in the omnipotence of human powers.



Barth writes of this:

Man who discovers his own power and ability, the potentiality dormant in his humanity, that is his human being as such, and looks upon it as the final, the real and absolute, I mean as something "detached," self-sustifying, with its own authority and power, which he can therefore set in motion in all directions and without any restraint-- this is absolute man.<sup>1</sup>

This is the man that Barth sees as defined and exalted by nineteenth century liberal theology. Barth rejects this image, and prefers to define man from the standpoint of revelation and the Word. He writes: "From the Christian point of view man is no higher, no lower, no other than what this Word declares him to be. He is the creature made visible in the mirror of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> The sin of man, according to Barth, is that he takes himself too seriously. The sin of Barthian theology, according to its critics, is that it does not take man seriously enough. Barth's point, however, is that man cannot be taken seriously until he first of all has taken God seriously. Man is to be understood from the God-ward side,<sup>3</sup> or from the Word which reveals not only God but also

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, Against the Stream, ed. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 185.

<sup>3</sup>According to Barth, man and mankind must not be interpreted in terms of Adam, that is, in the light of historical or philosophical conceptions of human nature, but through Christ. Adam becomes the cast-type of humanity and is the history of man and humanity outside of Christ. Karl Barth, Christ and Adam, trans. by T. A. Smail (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1956), p. 29. See also pp. 93-94 where

man.

Barth questions if the absolute man has not in fact asked himself and himself given the answer he really wished to hear from some other source.<sup>1</sup> It is here that Barth makes his criticism of nineteenth century theology most convincing, and introduces his own view. For him there is no answer apart from this other source, in the Word that only God can speak. Barth sees that Word spoken in Jesus Christ, who as "the revealing Word of God, is the source of our knowledge of the human nature God has made."<sup>2</sup>

Barth notes that the humanistic ideal of the Enlightenment and the idea of the absolute man was not universally accepted without evidence of tension even among its representatives. He points to the writing of Jean-Jacques Rousseau as giving indication of such a protest. Rousseau remained a faithful representative of humanism, but he encountered in the very structure of humanity itself qualities that protested against the humanistic ideal. Rousseau could not enter into

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Barth says, "Christ is not only God's Son; He is also a man who is not a sinner like Adam and all of us. He is true man in an absolute sense, and it is in His humanity that we have to recognize true human nature in the condition and character in which it was willed and created by God."

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III: The Doctrine of Creation, Part 2, trans. by G. W. Bromiley and others (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), p. 50. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, III. 2.

the general optimism which characterized his age, springing from faith in man's intellectual and moral capacities. He saw in society the powerful effects of social wrongs and it caused him to attack society radically. Rousseau saw these qualities as coming from outside of man. They were not natural man, but historical man, man in society. Barth sees these qualities of human imperfection as belonging to the very nature of man, and in the Reformation tradition as separating him from God.

It should be noted, however, that Barth's emphasis upon man's separation from God is more in the direction of "up-grading God" than that of "down-grading man." This is a distinctive quality in Barth's early theology and makes his contribution more than simply a renewal of the Reformation doctrine of original sin. A point often overlooked by Barth's critics is that he interprets man more in terms of creatureliness than in terms of sin. His creatureliness includes sin and guilt, but it is an estate that God makes his own problem.<sup>1</sup> God takes action on man's behalf, and Barth's emphasis is simply that the creature have "no arrogant illusion as to its own authority or competence."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III: The Doctrine of Creation, Part 3, trans. by G. W. Bromiley and R. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), pp. 359-64. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, III. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

The fundamental optimism which Rousseau questions is thus the basis for Barth's own protest against the humanistic ideal of nineteenth century theology. Barth turned outside of man to the God of biblical revelation for an answer, and Rousseau sought to turn even more toward man's "spirit nature." Barth says that what Rousseau discovered was himself,<sup>1</sup> and that in so doing he made a completely new discovery in the realm of anthropology but failed to find God. Thus, instead of Rousseau discovering new meaning in the word "God," he gave to the word "man" for the first time its full, whole tone.<sup>2</sup> His discovery was the contradiction between man and his deeds, and Barth sees this as sufficient grounds for challenging the theological absolutism of his time. Instead, Barth says that Rousseau carried it to its logical end.

There is evidence in his criticism of Rousseau that Barth does have an appreciation for the anthropocentric character of the gospel. He does not appropriate the insight he sees in Rousseau, preferring in the early efforts of his theology to direct primary attention to the object of revelation. His later remarks are not inconsistent with his early efforts, however, and reflect an understanding of man's relationship to the gospel. He says:

According to the biblical meaning of the word "truth"

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

the Gospel can only be presented and understood as a proclamation of God's mystery taking place between man and man, and therefore as an historical event. For the One whom the Gospel calls God has become man. That which the Gospel calls Spirit dwells in mortal bodies. Never and nowhere does the Gospel exist by itself.<sup>1</sup>

Barth recognizes from the beginning of his theology that the gospel has a word about man, and he points out that the Reformers did not neglect to split their theological center and oppose it by something different from it. They confronted the Word of God with the human correlate of faith, and Barth's concern is to show that this correlate had its own basis in the Word of God and was created and sustained by the Word.<sup>2</sup> This position is more than just an admission of the importance of seriously regarding God's action in regard to man, but also man's action in regard to God as well as to other men. In short, Barth's theology includes man, but he makes clear that man is not a "partner" in his own salvation. His primary emphasis is to deny the equality of man with God. This does not ignore man, but it does insure that he is subordinate. Barth says, "Certainly, the Bible speaks of man. But the revelation between God and man is always the revelation of a superior to a subordinate."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, A Shorter Commentary on Romans, trans. by D. H. van Daalen (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1959), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 339.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, God in Action, trans. by E. G. Homrighausen and others (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1936), p. 128.

Revelation thus understood does not allow or leave room for choice but only decision.<sup>1</sup> Barth replies to the question, "Do you mean to exclude man's ability to accept salvation?" by saying, "Yes. Faith is only through the work of the Holy Spirit. That we recognize the Son of God in the man Jesus is not a recognition of man's own definite act."<sup>2</sup> Revelation thus remains an event of God's sovereign initiative, and according to Barth, "Revelation is understood to be an event of the free and sovereign activity of God toward man."<sup>3</sup>

The consequence of Barth's position is not to merely recognize the infinite difference between God and man but also to note how man is to approach God. Barth points to the postulate by Thomas Aquinas that the Subject that rules the world is necessarily something that is separate and distinct from the world and says that while Thomas is justified in pointing to the independence and superiority of God as a being in himself, he is not justified in attempting to reach this being from the world.<sup>4</sup> Barth thus rejects all natural theology. There is no bridge from man toward God, and, "Man

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>John D. Godsey, ed., Karl Barth's Table Talk (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), pp. 64-65.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, God in Action, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, III. 3, p. 178.

has no possibility to know God 'through nature.' There is no knowledge of God which was given along with the existence and the essence of the world."<sup>1</sup> Anything possible to man per se, even religion, is in conflict with the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Barth's reply to the image of the absolute man of nineteenth century theology is therefore not merely to moderate his self-sufficiency but to interpret man as totally and absolutely dependent upon God and his revelation. Barth's substitute for man's powers of self-attainment is grace, saying that "from first to last the Bible directs us to the name of Jesus Christ,"<sup>3</sup> and "apart from and without Jesus Christ we can see nothing at all about God and man and

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Faith of the Church, p. 49. See also Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I: The Doctrine of the Word of God. Prolegomena, Part 2, trans. by G. T. Thomson and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), pp. 168-71, where Barth defines natural theology as the doctrine of a union of man with God existing outside God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The above reference is hereafter cited as Dogmatics, I. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 1, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), pp. 45-51. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, IV. 1. Man's estate apart from God is defined by Barth as one of "non-being." It is "nothingness," which is the concept Barth uses to define evil. He says, "nothingness is the past, . . . the ancient non-being which obscured and defaced the divine creation of God but which is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ." Barth, Dogmatics, III. 3, p. 363.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. II: The Doctrine of God, Part 2, trans. by G. W. Bromiley and others (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 53. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, II. 2.

their relationship with one another."<sup>1</sup> Professor Torrance sees this crisis between the anthropology of Barth and nineteenth century "neo-Protestantism" as the key to Barth's theological mentality. He notes that the "supreme charge" that Barth brought against that theology was "the reduction of all theology to some form of anthropology."<sup>2</sup> The result, says Torrance, was:

Nineteenth-century theology made it impossible to derive any benefit from a genuinely transcendent and objective Revelation, for from its very starting-point it stripped the Christian Religion of the specifically Christian elements which militated against its humanistic and rationalistic presuppositions, so that it could only fall back into the morass of spiritualistic anthropomorphism.<sup>3</sup>

Barth's anthropology in contrast is Christocentric, and man is interpreted from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He says: "What we really know of man, we know by means of this grace."<sup>4</sup> In Christ, we see man himself, what

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Torrance, Karl Barth, p. 60. Torrance points out, and Barth also notes, that Ludwig Feuerbach made the same charge but from an entirely different standpoint. Barth says the question Feuerbach asked theology was "whether the Godhead man sought and thought he had found in his consciousness was anything but man's shadow as it was projected upon the plane of the idea of the infinite." Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 387. See also pp. 358-59, where Barth's criticism of Feuerbach is that he attempted to turn theology into anthropology in his careless use of mystical ideas, of the union of God and man, and his use of these ideas in another than eschatologically insured connection.

<sup>3</sup>Torrance, Karl Barth, pp. 60-61.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III: The Doctrine of Creation, Part 4, trans. by A. T. Mackay and others (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), p. 41. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, III. 4.



and how he really is. Barth argues that man is not what he thinks himself to be, and not what he appears to be from a historical perspective, but what he is revealed to be in the gospel.<sup>1</sup> It is not only man's weakness that is to be discovered in the gospel but also his potential in Christ. This is Barth's view of the "ontological determination of humanity," which is included in his "theological anthropology," which "presupposes that real man is knowable and known in the light of the Word and revelation of God."<sup>2</sup> It is summarized by Barth:

It sees man in relationship to a transcendent God as his origin and goal. From the very outset it understands him as theonomously rather than autonomously determined, the human logos existing through the divine, humanity being the mirror of divinity. It apprehends man as a rational being, able to perceive God, and responsible, able to answer Him, and therefore as a personal being capable of history and decision.<sup>3</sup>

A concluding summary to Barth's evaluation and response to the absolute man of the Enlightenment-humanistic tradition is that he totally rejects him as leading to "religious anthropocentrism."<sup>4</sup> The entire period of nineteenth century theology is seen by Barth to be dominated by this image, and thus

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, II. 2, pp. 55-58.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 201. See also pp. 132-202, passim.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, trans. by J. N. Thomas and T. Wieser (London: Collins Press, 1961), p. 27. See also pp. 11-33 for Barth's discussion of this concept in the essay, "Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century."

so "man-centered" that God was lost sight of. Barth rejects what he considers a transcendent anthropology in favor of a biblically defined anthropology that is not fully developed in his early theology but which takes on progressive importance throughout the later volumes of the Church Dogmatics.

Barth's theology has an interesting parallel in the "Biblical-Realism" of the Dutch layman and missionary-theologian, Hendrik Kraemer. Kraemer also criticized the Enlightenment for its loss of God<sup>1</sup> and for falling into secularism and relativism. His criteria for judging theology, like that of Barth, was a rejection of man-centered, immanent concepts in favor of God-centered, transcendental ones. He too brought the Bible into confrontation with the humanistic ideal of nineteenth century theology, and, like Barth, lived long enough to see his work judged by the historical movement of theology. He seemed to have grasped the need for a dialectical method<sup>2</sup> of biblical interpretation early in his theology, but in retrospect he complained that he was not dialectical enough and as a result left an ambiguous or

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<sup>1</sup>Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1938), p. 10. Hereafter cited as Christian Message.

<sup>2</sup>Professor John Macquarrie defines the dialectical method of biblical interpretation as "paradoxically balancing each affirmation with a corresponding negation in order to do justice to a God who so infinitely transcends our finite creaturely being." John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Thought: The Frontier of Philosophy and Theology (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1963), p. 320.

obscure impression.<sup>1</sup> He had written in 1938 that the Bible "takes man and God radically and seriously,"<sup>2</sup> but in 1956 he saw that he had not developed his anthropology sufficiently to accomplish a true dialectic.

A similar transition is observable in the theology of Karl Barth. His early criticism of the anthropology of nineteenth century theology, when taken alone, appears extreme and as creating a void. The contemporary developments in theology have forced Barth, as they did Kraemer, to question the adequacy of his theological interpretation of man, and his more recent theology--as examined further in the thesis--gives an increasingly important place for man in his view of revelation.

### Religious Consciousness

Barth is also to be understood in contrast to the religious immanentism of the nineteenth century and the admission of religious consciousness as a source of authority for Christian faith. It is this characteristic of nineteenth century theology that most clearly defines the antithesis to

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<sup>1</sup>Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 8, 316.

<sup>2</sup>Kraemer, Christian Message, p. 41. Kraemer also speaks in his theology of the "lower categories of revelation," by which he means general religious experience, and thus assumes a less radical position than Barth in this regard. See Hendrik Kraemer, "Manifold Appraisal of Barth," Theology Today, XIII (October, 1956), 389-98.

Barth's theology of the Word. Liberal theology has always magnified the similarities between the religious experiences of men and religious consciousness as the ground of religious experience and minimized the uniqueness of the Christian faith. It might seem that Barth has simply turned this around in a change of emphasis. To understand Barth in this way, however, would fail to define the radical nature of his theology. According to Barth, there can be no relationship between the reality of God and the religious consciousness of man. He denies that there is any possibility of moving from religious feeling or experience toward God. Anything which starts with this basis will lead to something less than the God of the revealed Word. Barth interprets the Word of God as found in the historical record of the Bible as the only grounds for discovering the Christian faith. It is not to be subordinated to reason, experience, credal interpretation or form criticism or whatever.

Barth's evaluation of Friedrich Schleiermacher is therefore a critical factor in understanding his theology in relationship to that of the nineteenth century. Barth sees the distinctive beginnings of that theology in the publication of Schleiermacher's On Religion, Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers,<sup>1</sup> in 1799, and he has always considered the

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Humanity of God, p. 12. Schleiermacher's book outlines the basic approach of theology in the nineteenth century. In it he seeks to prove that the roots of

real opponent in his contest with nineteenth century theology to be Schleiermacher. The burden of Schleiermacher was to protect religion from its critics. In doing so, he sought to get behind the narrow dogmas and opinions, in fact behind thought itself, to personal and individual feeling. Religion, said Schleiermacher, is not doctrine, dogma, or ethics; it is inward emotion and disposition. Religion is feeling, linked with intuitions and known in experience. The Moravian emphasis on experience remained an influence on Schleiermacher. He writes:

Of all that I praise, all that I feel to be the true work of religion, you will find little even in the sacred books. To the man who has not himself experienced it, it would only be an annoyance and a folly.<sup>1</sup>

Schleiermacher's theology is thus one of pious feeling, or the theology of pious self-awareness.<sup>2</sup> Barth summarizes this theology by saying:

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religion lie in the structure of man's spiritual life. He saw the advance of civilization in all its secular as well as religious forms as a religious undertaking. In this regard, Schleiermacher is a "modern" in a truer sense than Barth.

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion. Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers, trans. by John Onan (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p. 45. Hereafter cited as On Religion. This book, and Schleiermacher's revolutionary dogmatics, The Christian Faith According to the Principles of the Evangelical Church Presented as a Coherent System, published for the first time in 1821-1822, marked the beginning of a new era in theology that was to dominate for almost a hundred years. The spirit of Schleiermacher is by no means dead even in contemporary theology.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 335.

The great formal principle of Schleiermacher's theology is at the same time its material principle. Christian pious self-awareness contemplates itself: that is, in principle the be-all and end-all of this theology.<sup>1</sup>

Schleiermacher insisted, however, that in rejecting the then popular notion of Christianity as "ill-put together fragments of metaphysics and ethics,"<sup>2</sup> and turning inwardly to "the inward emotions,"<sup>3</sup> and religious consciousness, he is speaking of knowledge about God and not God himself.<sup>4</sup> Barth would no doubt appreciate Schleiermacher's desire that Christianity remain free from a religious system that would bind it and make it unreal, because he shares this desire in his own theology, but he denies that it is possible to find even a knowledge about God from within man's religious consciousness. This can be considered radical, but it is the very point where Barth wants his theology to be radical.<sup>5</sup> The basic core of Barth's theology can be seen in his demand that faith, man, experience or whatever be confronted with an object of a personal opposite number, lest it become self-sufficient.

Barth's criticism of Schleiermacher concerns his occupation with the human element in theology. Whereas for Schleiermacher, man, human self-awareness was the central

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>2</sup>Schleiermacher, On Religion, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 18ff.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, God in Action, pp. 120-33.

subject for his theology, for Barth--as it was for the Reformers--it is God, Christ, and revelation.<sup>1</sup> He reflects in his examination of Schleiermacher a willingness to make theology an exercise between both God and man, but Barth feels that Schleiermacher made man his first and only concern. He acknowledges that Schleiermacher intended that his theology should be one of the Holy Spirit, but says, "Schleiermacher presents as the theme of theology, as seen from the anthropocentric point of view, not the outpouring of the Holy Spirit--this might itself have been possible--but religious consciousness as such."<sup>2</sup>

Barth is emphasizing that while it is all right for theology to shift interest toward man, it must not leave its sphere of authority, which for him is the Word. An emphasis on man does not have to mean man without God, and Barth acknowledges that Schleiermacher intended for his theology to bring man face to face with God. His criticism is that Schleiermacher used borrowed presuppositions from his Enlightenment influence, rather than the Reformation themes of sin and grace, with the consequence that he was less concerned with God as with the consciousness of God.

Barth's objection with Schleiermacher's premise is

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, pp. 339-41.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

the idea that the knowledge of God is "immediate."<sup>1</sup> This meant for Barth that theology had lost its real and proper subject matter and its only legitimate concern. Barth's early emphasis was a deliberate attempt to re-direct theology to its proper subject matter, which meant for him that man had to look outside of himself. The necessary quality of God that Barth was justifiably insisting upon, in contrast to humanism, is that God can and does exist apart from man. The unique and amazing quality of the Christian God, and Barth admittedly does not give adequate attention to this quality in the early stages of his theology, is that he has chosen not to exist apart from man.

A fair question to ask Barth's theology is, "What does faith become when it becomes man's experience?" Barth is highly critical of Schleiermacher and nineteenth century theology for autonomizing man's religious knowledge but he leaves unsatisfactory the entire question of faith from a man-ward side. Religious knowledge to Barth is knowledge of the Bible but it is also a "faith knowledge" which is able to "appropriate" the Word of God or the living reality of God within the Bible. The Bible is more than history. It is a vehicle--

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 339-40. This is Barth's objection to the entire influence within theology which points to man's self-contained religious consciousness. He rejects the whole Romantic movement as represented by Novalis (pp. 225-26), the theology of Lessing (p. 138), and Herder (pp. 200-213), all of whom Barth sees as forerunners of Schleiermacher and nineteenth century liberal theology.



an effective channel for the Word of God--in that the living reality of God is made known within it.<sup>1</sup> Barth recognizes that faith without any historical ground upon which to base itself would degenerate into mysticism without religious content, and he finds that ground within the history of the biblical witness to Jesus Christ, but he does not feel that to maintain the reality of that content it is necessary to surrender the essence of faith to a mere historical occurrence.

Where is the essence of faith to be discovered?

Barth's answer, which is not developed until the later stages of his theology, is that the essence of faith is to be known only in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> He substitutes a Christocentric basis for the content of religious knowledge in place of the anthropocentric one of nineteenth century theology. Barth's insistence that reality be grounded in Jesus Christ is central to his theology, and he faces the challenge of providing a meaningful demonstration of that reality in his own dogmatic system. The accusation has been consistently brought against Barth that his separation of faith and history (a criticism to be examined later in the chapter) dissolves all content

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I: The Doctrine of the Word of God. Prolegomena, Part 1, trans. by G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), pp. 141ff. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, I. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 3, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961 and 1962), pp. 85ff. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, IV. 3.

in the Christian knowledge of God<sup>1</sup> in that God is beyond our knowing.<sup>2</sup>

Barth questions the reality of God in man's religious consciousness because it is not grounded in an objective source. The knowledge of God in Barth's theology, on the other hand, is impossible to examine because it lies beyond the realm of historical investigation. God is not real in man's religious awareness, according to Barth, because he is utterly distinct from man and can only be known in his self-revelation. The knowledge of God in Barth's theology must always be centered in Christ and can never be a possession of man. When a man experiences God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, does that revelation not become a part of his "human" experience? Barth does not offer a satisfactory answer to this question.

One of the key weaknesses in Barth's theology is in fact the absence of any place for Christian experience. There is almost the absence of any possibility for Christian experience because of the difficulty of relating God in Barthian terms to the real world of man's experience. Barth moves toward a correction of this difficulty in the most recent

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas W. Ogletree, Christian Faith and History, A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 98. Hereafter cited as Faith and History.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 45.

sections of the Dogmatics, but even here he shows little enthusiasm for Christian feeling and experience, even when it results from a genuine encounter with God. Barth claims that he has always maintained the possibility of a legitimate expression of Schleiermacher's "doctrine of faith" (which would recognize faith as touching man's historical situation), but he has shown that he has no personal desire to pursue the attempt and has rejected every attempt by others.<sup>1</sup> Barth says that he "opposed Schleiermacher and subjectivism because it was necessary at the time. Another time, those who have learned something from the Church Dogmatics may begin with Christian subjectivism."<sup>2</sup> However, it is clear from Barth's theology, both old and new, and taken as a whole, that he does not share any direct interest in man's religious experience.

The image of the absolute man, with its idealistic influence upon theology, made it natural to identify the sources of Christian faith and reality as immanent possibilities.

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<sup>1</sup>Barth's comments in a letter to Professor Ronald Gregor Smith of the University of Glasgow on Ebeling's The Nature of Faith were to the effect that his doctrine of faith lacked "the object of a personal opposite number," and "appears to your representation as a self-sufficient." His summary was: "This doctrine of faith lives like that of Schleiermacher from the pathos (which is always rising again in theological history) of a critically unifying reduction whose decisive motive is not Wesen (essence, truth, courage, reality, power) of faith, but it is the directing of his 'apologia' in accomplishment of which it now becomes almost breathless and almost unrecognizable." Karl Barth, Letter to Professor Ronald Gregor Smith on Ebeling's The Nature of Faith.

<sup>2</sup>Godsey, Karl Barth's Table Talk, p. 13.

As the self-sufficient man was the anthropological basis for theology in the nineteenth century, so religious consciousness and experience were the grounds for man's knowledge of God. Liberal theology continues to take support from man's supposedly innate and essential capacity to "sense and taste the infinite" after the thought of Schleiermacher, and the "religious a priori" as later affirmed by Troeltsch.<sup>1</sup> The challenge Barth offers to liberal theology both past and present is to insist that the door is closed between God and man from the standpoint of human effort, and can only be opened from the side of God, and that God and man meet only in grace.

Barth's theology can continue to be understood from its confrontation with Schleiermacher. Man is the center of Schleiermacher's thinking, and God secondary and important because of man's piety. God is the center of Barth's thought. He refuses to start with religion or piety and begins instead with the Word directed to man which can never become man's possession or a quality of himself. This continues to be the ground that separates the theology of Karl Barth and that of Protestant liberalism with regard to the question of authority and the ground of faith.

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<sup>1</sup>See Professor Torrance's discussion of Barth's challenge to liberal theology in this regard. Torrance, Karl Barth, pp. 55-60.

### The Problem of History

The confrontation between the theology of Karl Barth and nineteenth-century theology really centers in the problem of historical interpretation. Barth's challenge to the absolute man and religious consciousness are in reality a part of this central problem. Some of Barth's early British critics were quick to take up the plea for historical relevance that they regarded as missing in his theology. Canon F. R. Barry said that Barth's theology "isolates the Christian experience from the Revelation of God in the homely goodness of plain men, and leads to an exaggerated other worldliness."<sup>1</sup> Professor C. E. Raven wrote that "this theology eliminates all place for human effort. It destroys the whole possibility of human effort,"<sup>2</sup> to which Barth would reply, "exactly!" but he is still faced with the challenge of an adequate historical interpretation for his theology. The plea for historical relevance is still a consistent comment on Barthian theology.

It is the degree to which Barth feels he must go in his separation of revelation from historical knowledge that raises the most serious questions regarding his theology. An

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<sup>1</sup>John McConnachie, The Barthian Theology and the Man of Today (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1933), p. 290.

<sup>2</sup>C. E. Raven, Jesus and the Gospel of Love (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1931), p. 433, quoted by McConnachie, ibid., p. 309.

example of this is his use of the term urgeshichte to define certain events of Christian dogma such as the virgin birth.<sup>1</sup> In using this term, he is going beyond heilgeschichte, meaning special or "salvation history." When Barth uses the term urgeshichte, he means that they are historically unknowable, being "theological knowledge."<sup>2</sup> This makes the problem of historical accessibility more acute than perhaps is really necessary to Barth's own position. He seems to feel, however, that he must go to this degree to maintain the "transcendent" quality of these truths. When Barth maintains that revelation events take place within history and yet are not historically knowable, there is scarcely any way to deny the ambiguity of such concepts from a historical point of view. Barth means that they are important from a Christian point of view but inaccessible to historical study. We must therefore accept them or reject them on the basis of "faith" alone.

The two contrasting ways of approaching the problem of history within Christianity is brought clearly into focus in a comparison between Karl Barth and Ernst Troeltsch.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf, Vol. I: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur Christlichen Dogmatik (München: Kaiser, 1927), p. 264. Hereafter cited as Christliche Dogmatik.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) belongs properly to the twentieth century and is not included by Barth in his review of nineteenth century theology. However, he perfectly exemplifies the historical spirit of nineteenth century liberal

Troeltsch represents a radical form of the theology of Albrecht Ritschl and both direct primary attention toward man's historical situation. Troeltsch makes Christianity a relative religion and by no means absolute, even though he admits it to be the highest type for the European-American mind.

Barth's view of revelation places him in direct contradiction to the very basis of Troeltsch's system, but a comparison of their respective use of history helps to view Barth's theology in a critical light.

Troeltsch is fundamentally a historian and only secondarily interested in theology. As a philosopher of history, he is greatly influenced by the methods and conclusions of historical research and wants religious experience to be compatible to modern historical thinking. Barth, on the other hand, is not so concerned with the importance of historical thinking for modern man. His concern with history results from the simple fact that Christian faith at its very center concerns history. Barth has never sought to minimize the fact that Christian faith is grounded in the acts of God within human history. He has faced that issue squarely. For Barth,

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theology and from this standpoint is more a representative of the mentality of the nineteenth century than of the twentieth. Hans Frie has suggested that the two positions taken by Troeltsch and Barth as they relate to history are probably the basic theological question in this area. Hans Frie, Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1957), p. 64.

theological thinking is itself a kind of historical thinking. The question we must ask Barth as we view him from his own position is whether there is a perspective from which to view an interpretation of history which is uniquely Christian as opposed to purely historical as reflected in Troeltsch. Barth believes that there is. The suggestion that theology does not have to be developed in isolation to historical research does not mean for him that it must move its center away from revelation into historical method and criticism. It means that it must listen seriously to the questions and problems posed by history and incorporate what is valid to its own interest.

Troeltsch would challenge the notion that there is any event, whether it be heilsgeschichte or whatever--if it takes place in history--that cannot be examined by historical inquiry. To reserve certain events or dogmas as being known only in faith is, according to Troeltsch, untenable in the light of modern historical thinking. He sees all of history as interrelated. Thus Troeltsch writes that in spite of the claims of orthodoxy,

Christianity is in all moments of its history a purely historical appearance, an individual historical appearance conditioned in all respects as is also the case with the other great religions. It is subject in every moment of its history to investigation by the common, established historical methods.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ernst Troeltsch, Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929), p. 42. Hereafter cited as Die Absolutheit. Quoted by Ogle-  
tree, Faith and History, p. 34.



Troeltsch further criticizes that dogmatic thinking breaks the idea of historical continuity in that it separates history into that which is holy and that which is profane. This makes one moment of greater significance than another which Troeltsch cannot accept.<sup>1</sup>

Over against Troeltsch's view of relativism in history, we can compare Barth's dogmatic claim that in Jesus Christ the goal of history is revealed within history. Barth is willing to admit to the relativity of all other history but not the history of the Christian event. Certain things within Christianity, insofar as they are themselves earthly and historical, are relative<sup>2</sup> but not Jesus Christ. Troeltsch argues that the "facts" about Jesus, like all other historical facts, can and should be established by historical-critical research and should be the determining basis for our faith. Barth's answer is that Troeltsch has relativized the gospel and thereby robbed it of its authority. The positive element

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<sup>1</sup>Troeltsch, Die Absolutheit, p. 22, quoted by Ogle-tree, Faith and History, p. 36. There are philosophers of history, e.g., Arnold Toynbee, An Historian's Approach to Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), who would question if Troeltsch is justified in his claim that all of history is relative, even from an historical point of view. There is a direction within contemporary theology, originally inspired by Bonhoeffer, that again raises Troeltsch's question as to the necessity of dividing history into the holy and the profane, and at the same time allows that one moment in history can and does have greater and even decisive importance over others. In this sense, it challenges both Troeltsch and Barth.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 115-48, passim.

that Troeltsch could lend to Barth is that when God enters history, history ceases to be unimportant, precisely as history, and not, as Barth insists, something more than history.

Barth's early writings reflect a view of history which regards it as inherently meaningless. He is wrong here and reflects a fundamental weakness in his theology. History is full of meaning in the Christian tradition. Christ enriches history--from eternity. History has meaning before and after the Incarnation. Barth at times sets Christianity and history in an unnecessary opposition. Barth's purpose is to repudiate the assumption that history, being relative, has any intrinsic connection with the Absolute. The relationship between God and man is therefore extrinsic in Barth and only possible by the free act of God. He needs a way of expressing this without putting faith and history into conflict. It may be that Troeltsch could have helped him at this point in his concept of the Absolute as being intrinsic in the relativity of history.<sup>1</sup>

The contribution that Troeltsch makes to theology is his plea for a richer understanding and use of history. In his own use of history, he prefers universal history over history as narrow nationalism in an effort to find an absolute within the relativism of history as such. He views all of history, including Christianity, as being relative but at the

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<sup>1</sup>Ogletree, Faith and History, pp. 92-93.

same time associates an absolute quality with history.

Troeltsch sees the ebb and flow, the continuity of history as its eternal quality. The absolute of history in a sense is its complete relativity. The absolute "hovers before" all of the relative process of history, drawing history to itself as its Source and God. All of history is a relative manifestation of the Absolute and the unfolding of the divine Ground of life.<sup>1</sup>

The historical significance of the gospel as emphasized by Troeltsch leads us to ask Barth at what point in this theology are we to find the meeting between God and man. Is it a point in history? If it is an "eternally revealed" moment, is it historical or non-historical? Barth follows Soren Kierkegaard at this point in his theology in maintaining with him that the moment is of decisive significance in man's attainment of the truth.<sup>2</sup> In Jesus Christ the eternal entered time, the absolute became historical.<sup>3</sup> Barth says, "In Christ it is God himself who became man, and not a half-god, not an appearance of God. The existence of Jesus is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: University Press, 1936), pp. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 2, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), pp. 50-51. Hereafter cited as Dogmatics, IV. 2.

the manifestation of God's Existence."<sup>1</sup> The event is not synonymous with history, although it takes place within history. The revelation of God in the historical event of Jesus Christ cannot be seen by the objective, natural eye of reason only. It can be known only by an act of human decision corresponding to the act of divine decision.<sup>2</sup> This is what Barth calls the "obedience of faith,"<sup>3</sup> and is the only means for a real knowledge of God.

Thomas Ogletree is no doubt right when he observes that a genuine synthesis is not possible between the choice of a dogmatic theology or a historically derived one.

One either gives controlling place to the methods and conclusions of historical thinking or the methods and conclusions of dogmatic thinking. Between these two there does not seem to be any middle ground.<sup>4</sup>

There is possibly some middle ground but certainly no possibility for synthesis, as Ogletree suggests. It becomes obvious, however, that Barth's theology needs the critical insight of Troeltsch's historical emphasis lest it lose all historical significance, which Barth is himself intent on maintaining. The problem that Troeltsch forces Barth to face, and Barth does so more successfully in the later Dogmatics

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Faith of the Church, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. II: The Doctrine of God, Part 1, trans. by T. H. L. Parker and others (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ogletree, Faith and History, p. 13.

than in his original position taken in his book on Romans, is, as Ogletree suggests, "the significance of the decisiveness of the point of intersection between time and eternity and the relationship of this point to its historical neighborhood."<sup>1</sup>

Troeltsch also points up Barth's failure to formulate a doctrine of biblical authority. He has been criticized as neglecting to relate biblical studies (hermeneutics) to his theology, and even at times ignoring the problems of hermeneutics and form criticism. This is not altogether true of Barth's theology. It would be more correct to say that in choosing revelation as the criterion for governing theological interpretation Barth has chosen a standard which is much more difficult to evaluate and even impossible from a scientific-historical point of view. It leaves him with the problem of qualifying it from another vantage point, which he tries to do. Edward Thurneysen defends Barth's method:

Never has Karl Barth denied the validity of the established results of historical critical research. He was glad to be liberated by it from the dogma of a false "revelation-positivism." But he did not let himself be liberated from this only to surrender at once to a new liberal dogma of the validity of the present-day world view in antithesis to biblical truth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth and Edward Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making, Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, trans. by James D. Smart (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964),

In attempting to understand Barth's theological interpretation of history, one must note both his desire to point beyond history in defining the events of revelation and at the same time see his appreciation for the essentially historical nature of the Christian faith. It is because he gives these two sides of the same question almost equal emphasis at times that he is accused of being ambiguous in his treatment of history. His ambiguity is that of interpreting a history which is not history at all in the usual sense and not merely history. The historical problem is thus one posed by the very nature of revelation. To insist that revelation is to be interpreted in purely historical terms is to return to the humanism from which Barth is endeavoring to escape.

Barth regards the characteristic interest of nineteenth-century theology in the historical aspect of the Christian faith as a prime source of weakness but primarily because of the one-sided nature of its emphasis. He considers, on the other hand, the greatest achievement of that theology to be the recognition of the essentially historical nature of the Christian faith. It is this which sets Christianity apart from other religions. Barth says:

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p. 21. Barth's position in accepting the authority of the revealed Word leaves him with the problems of the canon and related questions of biblical authority. See Barth's answer to the question, "What differentiates your understanding of the Word of God from that of a fundamentalist?" Godsey, Karl Barth's Table Talk, pp. 26-27.

Christian faith is shaped by its relationship to the history which finds its central meaning in the name of Jesus Christ. For this reason Biblical exegesis and the study of the history of the church and its dogmas were bound to become again urgent and distinctive tasks.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's criticism was that although theologians interpreted Christianity in terms of history as it finds its central meaning in the name of Jesus Christ, his person and his life, it was never more than a historical phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> This is the basis of Barth's refutation of the concepts of Albrecht Ritschl. In rejecting the theology of Ritschl, Barth is rejecting the whole attempt to resolve the contradiction between the human situation and God by directing attention toward man's historical position. Ritschl was aware of this contradiction within man himself when he spoke of "the contradiction in which man finds himself, as both a part of the world of nature and a spiritual personality."<sup>3</sup> Ritschl sought to resolve the

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Humanity of God, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Albrecht Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, trans. and ed. by H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), p. 199. Two of Ritschl's disciples who developed his ethical ideals even further were Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack. Harnack's emphasis on human brotherhood under the divine fatherhood is a beautiful one with profound social significance, but it is wide-open to the probing criticism of Barth's theology: that we cannot assume the fatherhood of God by simply practicing the brotherhood of man. It should be recalled that von Harnack was Barth's early guide to theological liberalism when he studied at the University of Berlin as a young student. It was the failure of liberal theology in the very area of practical ethics which led Barth to reject its entire basis. Barth recalls with decisive significance the events of 1914, and the involvement of Ernst Troeltsch,

contradiction by utilizing the knowledge of scientific and historical research, which Barth has totally and clearly refuted, describing the whole attempt as a "blind alley."

Barth's plea is for a Christocentric faith, based only upon the revealed Word of God. He asks:

Was Jesus Christ really nothing more than the original phenomenon of Christian faith? Was He not to be comprehended as its ground, content, and object on the basis of the first records--the New Testament--as well as of the later accounts--those of the Church--varied and conditioned by their time as they were? Was, therefore, Christ's historical existence at all accessible to a research which reached beyond the texts of the New Testament?<sup>1</sup>

It is this consistency with the reformation treatment of Christology<sup>2</sup> that marks Barth's strength and uniqueness alongside both the theology of the nineteenth century and much of contemporary theology. It has an inevitable influence upon his interpretation of man, the world, and history. So much

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Adolf von Harnack, and the leading German intellectuals in those events. He says:

"One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counsellors. Among those intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I had greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, nineteenth-century theology no longer held any future." Barth, Humanity of God, p. 14.

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Humanity of God, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I, 1, pp. 501-5.



so that Barth confesses that when he uses the term "historical event," "historical does not therefore have its usual meaning of 'historical.'"<sup>1</sup>

If Barth's insistence that salvation history be based upon and interpreted from the New Testament is theological dogmatism, then he is guilty. The failure of nineteenth century theology's historical aims, according to Barth, was that it was content to stop with the merely historical and not seek to know the revealed Word that became flesh. Barth calls this a failure to discover "real history," by which he means knowledge of the living God, and the real, eternal revelation that takes place in Jesus Christ. This "real" history is in danger of being reduced to a "pious notion," according to Barth, and becoming just a history of man. He sees this as a monologue, or a "symbol of a current alternating between a man and his own heights or depths,"<sup>2</sup> when in fact, "history is a dialogue of God and man where man is confronted by the Lord of history who stands over and apart from him."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Humanity of God, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 21. Barth speaks of the "fallen" nature of history: "The history of the world which God made in Jesus Christ . . . cannot cease to have its center and goal in Him. But in the light of this goal and center God cannot say Yes but only No to its corruption." Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 506. It seems therefore that Barth's view of man in history is not so much one which ignores man's historical nature, but one which must in the end say no to him because of his sin.

Barth's historical views are consistent with his position as a revelation theologian. It is difficult to see how he could remove any significant ambiguity and remain true to his basic theological position. He is defending the sovereign Lord of history whom he regards as denied by the historical confinement of nineteenth century theology. There is also the problem of history itself. This is an area where theology has always found itself faced with ambiguity. Professor Donald Baillie, while he criticizes Barth's historical interpretations, recognizes the nature of the problem and writes:

It is true that as soon as we do claim historical facts as entering into the Christian faith, problems arise, because faith then seems to be placed at the mercy of the science of historical criticism. Thus a certain tension is set up. But is not that part of the inevitable tension of faith, which belongs to our human situation in the world?<sup>1</sup>

The theology of Karl Barth offers a clear contrast to the historical emphasis of the nineteenth century which Barth saw as reflecting a tendency for man to regard himself as superior to the past and as possessing an innate criterion for judging the present. He has skillfully criticized the loss of God in the historical methodology of nineteenth century theology. He has at the same time admitted the genuine historical elements within Christianity, while also insisting that certain events are "more than history." If Christianity

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Baillie, God Was in Christ (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1961), pp. 223-24.

is to relate itself to a world which is essentially historical and relate Jesus Christ as the Lord of humanity, with the world as the scene of his revelation and activity, then Barth must face the challenge of a new and meaningful interpretation of history as he rejects the whole of nineteenth century theology.

### The Accommodation of Theology to Philosophy

A final area of Barth's criticism of the nineteenth century concerns theology's philosophical accommodation with the prevailing secular world view. The preoccupation of the theologians of the nineteenth century with their contemporary philosophers is anything but a point in their favor according to Barth. The fact that the theologians were accustomed to treat idealist metaphysics as an ally against unbelief, and that the philosophers found the knowledge of God useful as a central theme, is an indication to Barth of the general confusion of the entire period. He asks, "Did the theologians, if they knew about God, need to be so superstitiously respectful of natural science, and so eager to present themselves as scientists of the spirit, as they were . . . in the second half of the nineteenth-century?"<sup>1</sup>

The philosophy of Hegel represents for Barth the most perfect expression of eighteenth-century absolute man and is

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 301.

the crowning example of a philosophical expression of Christianity. The course of nineteenth century theology was expressed through Hegel's speculative Idealism. His philosophy is one of self-confidence. It is the confidence of thinking man in the dignity and value of his thought. Barth sees it as the most successful of all attempts to establish a relationship between revelation, faith, and history<sup>1</sup> and in refuting it, Barth is rejecting all efforts to accomplish a merger between philosophy and theology.

In the thought of Hegel, God is the absolute Mind, but not another mind. He is the essence of all finite minds, and they are constituents of it. Man for Hegel is finite spirit and as such he is ultimately identical with infinite Spirit. It is the development of the finite mind that gives rise to consciousness of the Infinite and Absolute or God. The Idealism of Hegel is therefore rigorously immanent and has been defined as a form of pantheistic Monism.<sup>2</sup> Against all of this, Barth proclaims the absolute supremacy of the biblical Word because of the absolute supremacy of the God who speaks that Word. Barth sees this Word as a manifestation to men which reaches its full expression in God's witness in the Word made flesh, in Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, p. 161.

Barth interprets Hegel as saying that the Absolute has reality only in the mind and thought of those who believe in him. The God of Barth's theology exists independent of man and is only known by his self-revelation. Faith, according to Barth, arises from the Word itself.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of man being able to hear the Word of God, or faith, does not rest within man's capacity. It is a gift of God's grace. In contrast to this is Hegel's principle of identity as mediated through difference (thesis-antithesis-synthesis). Thought and being, no less, is a dialectical process which moves forward by the development and reconciliation of opposites. By this process both thought and being make their way upward by a spiral progress, by the alternate production and removal of contradictions. Hegel does not limit this process to humanity but applies it to all levels of reality, and even to the Being of God himself.<sup>2</sup> Thus, philosophy alone, and not religion, was Hegel's key to the understanding of God and of man's relation to him, because the key to knowledge was for him speculation.

Hegel's purpose was to derive a knowledge of God from the universal human capability of reason. He emphasized that the world depends upon God as the Absolute, but he leaves Barth once and for all when he adds that the Absolute conversely

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup>Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, pp. 103-5.

depends upon the world. God and the universe are one reality to Hegel. Barth's rejection of any idea of mutual independence, or a reciprocity between whole and part, is absolute. He says,

God would be none the less God if He had not created a world and man. The world's existence and our own existence is in no wise essentially necessary to God, even as the object of His love.<sup>1</sup>

And further, "God does not owe us either our being, or in our being his love."<sup>2</sup>

Barth's ultimate reason for rejecting Hegel is the impossibility of any encounter between man and God, when in Hegel man is elevated into a relationship of identity with God.<sup>3</sup> Barth says, "With Hegel God and man can never confront one another in a relationship which is actual and indissoluble, a word, a new word revelatory in the strict sense, cannot pass between them."<sup>4</sup> For Hegel to be acceptable to Barth, the self-movement of truth would have to be detached from the self-movement of man, and in Hegel these are equated. Barth regards Hegel's identification of God with the dialectical method as an abolition of God's sovereignty. God becomes the prisoner of mind and thought, and is understood from the point of view

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, II. 1, p. 281. Barth refuses to think of God as "the impersonal absolute," "the highest good" or some other abstract idea. God is personal, even though incomprehensible. Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 303.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

of man. Revelation is no longer a free act of God. Barth comments, "Hegel, in making the dialectical method of logic the essential nature of God, made impossible the knowledge of the actual dialectic of grace."<sup>1</sup>

The real crisis between Hegel and Barth, as it relates to nineteenth-century theology, is in the area of Christology. Hegel is not ready to concede the final reality of the Christian revelation, although he sees it as the highest form of religion. It is the place where the self-consciousness of God comes to its fullest reality in the mind of man, but the Absolute never achieves actual reality in the sense of a completed process. Hegel's philosophy had a determining influence in shaping the Christology of the nineteenth century and Barth's assertion of the once-for-all nature of God's revelation in Christ places him in direct contradiction to that theology. It is not only the finality of Christ as God's revelation in Barth's theology that is emphasized but the totality of it.

To lean toward a Hegelian view of faith is to seek God in man as the Reason within his reason, the Conscience within his conscience. If, however, God is seen as the eternal One over all, whose being is totally other than human, though mindful of the God-given rationality in man, then there is sympathy with Barth's rejection of Hegel's theology. One may find it necessary to question whether Barth

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

appreciates sufficiently the positive accomplishments of theology in seeking for a philosophical expression, but we must acknowledge the strength of his argument in seeking to establish theology upon its own foundation. The social courage of theology's attempt to communicate with the world through Hegel's concepts is acknowledged by Barth, but in the end it is condemned.

Barth has never contended, however, that the theologian can operate independently of philosophical assumptions. He knows that all humans think and speak philosophically. He merely asserts that the philosophy employed serves the purposes of the gospel, rather than vice-versa. The failure of theology in regard to philosophy, according to Barth, has not been its use of philosophy but the tendency on the part of theology to allow philosophy to dictate the nature and substance and form of the gospel. Philosophy, from Barth's viewpoint, can be a good servant but a poor master. It should always be made subsidiary but not eliminated.<sup>1</sup>

The examination of nineteenth century evangelical theology through the eyes of Karl Barth is important first of all

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<sup>1</sup>Robert McAfee Brown points out that in Barth's Dogmatics, III. 1, he has long sections on Marcion and Schopenhauer (pp. 334-40), Descartes (pp. 350-63), and Leibniz (pp. 388-414). In Dogmatics, III. 2, Barth deals with contemporary existentialism and Fichte (pp. 96-109). This characteristic is predominant throughout the Dogmatics, and evidences Barth's philosophical perception and critique.



because it is only against this background that one can understand the currents of theology that have characterized the developments of his own thought and that of all theology from the turn of the century until now. Secondly, many of the current trends in theology are really continuations of trends that are directly traceable to the developments in this period and serve as a valuable aid in critiquing Barth's criticism and perhaps pointing to weaknesses in his own view. A third importance is that many of the elements that determine the shape of theological trends are secular imports. Theologians are not exclusively theological men. They can not be and they should not be. The reigning doctrines of philosophy and science are always likely to play a major role in the questions to which theology addresses itself and the answers it gives.

Theology in the nineteenth century was the result of a covenant between Christianity and modern thought, accomplished through the efforts of men like Schleiermacher and Hegel. John McConnachie says, "Religion put forth all its efforts to permeate the life and thought of the time with Christian ideas."<sup>1</sup> Philosophical and scientific conclusions were embraced and given theological dignity. The knowledge of man at his best was a "theological" knowledge, and man

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<sup>1</sup>John McConnachie, The Significance of Karl Barth (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p. 15.

became the center and measure of all things. Barth saw clearly that in a search for truth, theology had gone deeper and deeper into subjectivism and relativism. It was preoccupied with man, his mind and his world. In an attempt to harmonize faith and history, the objective content of the Christian faith was lost insofar as an absolute or final authority.

Theology during this period, under the influence of an idealistic philosophy, gave birth to the "liberal" school and in company with that school the interest in the "Jesus of history," and an optimistic idealism that expressed itself in a concept of the coming "kingdom of God." It was Barth who first saw clearly the necessity of establishing Christianity on a basis apart from man, experience, or any other anthropocentric center. He turned to the reality of God, as revealed in the Word, as the clearest hope for theology, and reasserted the supernatural in Christianity.

Karl Barth is to be recognized as having a penetrating insight into the theology of the nineteenth century and as having uncovered its glaring weakness---the absence of God. It is questionable, however, if the "change of direction" which he later admits to would have been such a radical one if he had used his insight to better advantage to provide in his own theology a more meaningful expression of man himself, his needs and his world. The following chapter of the thesis will offer a critical appraisal of Barth's initial thrust in theology as he offers a new direction to Protestant thought.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

Theology in the nineteenth century was concerned with the subject of God, but beginning with Schleiermacher and continuing through the major voices of the century--including Hegel, Ritschl, Troeltsch--the dominant feature was the tendency to interpret theology from the vantage point of man, whether by consciousness, reason, history, or whatever. This effort, while it endeavored to speak of God's reality, was in the end a loss of that reality that resulted in the theology known as liberalism. God is hardly distinguishable from man.

Karl Barth proclaims in the face of this theology that the Bible reveals that God is not the continuation of man's capabilities and desires but is totally other than these things. He urges men to seek God as a reality apart from these things and to find his reality in "the strange new world within the Bible."<sup>1</sup> In this world, the chief consideration is "not the doings of man but the doings of God."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Word of God, pp. 29-50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

It is a new world, the world of God, proclaiming God's sovereignty, his glory, his incomprehensible love.<sup>1</sup> Barth's theme becomes:

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ. It is this which is within the Bible. The word of God is within the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

This new concern of Barth becomes also his principle of interpretation.

The clearest statement that Barth makes in regard to his hermeneutical principle is given in the first preface to his Der Romerbrief: "My whole energy of interpretation has been expended in an endeavor to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit."<sup>3</sup> He calls attention to the historical-critical method of biblical investigation as having its rightful place in the preparation of the intelligence. Barth does not feel that he has been forced to choose between this method and the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 37, 45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 1. This is more than an attempt by Barth to "by-pass" history, as Bultmann for instance seems at times to do in his preference for the eternal, but rather an attempt to understand what is a true meaning and interpretation of history, as "an uninterrupted conversation between the wisdom of yesterday and the wisdom of tomorrow." Ibid.

"venerable doctrine of Inspiration," but if the choice were necessary, he says, "I would without hesitation adopt the latter."<sup>1</sup>

The place at which Barth is open to criticism is not that he has no hermeneutical principle, but as is often the case, the fact that the principle he employs does not allow the biblical message to interpret itself with sufficient freedom to challenge his theological view. There is always the danger of imposing a hermeneutical principle upon the text or content of the biblical revelation rather than allowing the text to interpret itself independent of a pre-determined principle. An example of this weakness can be seen in the theology of Bultmann. While he employs a more radical and critical view of scripture than Barth, his real hermeneutical principle is more than demythologization and includes the influence of Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy, so that many see his theology as a "re-mythologization" of scripture under that influence. To substantiate this criticism one has only to note that in Bultmann's application

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. In the Preface to the Third Edition, Barth acknowledges the criticism to his method of interpretation, including Bultmann's charge that his method of exegesis was a "modern form of the dogma of Inspiration" which Barth does not deny. He says, "I have never attempted to conceal the fact that my manner of interpretation has certain affinities with the old doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. As expounded by Calvin, the doctrine seems to me at least worthy of careful consideration as capable of leading to spiritual apprehension." Ibid., p. 18.

of the conclusions of both lower and higher criticism, it is too coincidental that what is left of the New Testament message is almost pure existentialism. There is not the real nature of a dialectical interpretation that would allow the biblical text to speak its own unique and peculiar emphasis. One observes this in Barth, with the difference that where for Bultmann it is an existential interpretation, for Barth it is the principle of the absolute sovereignty of God. He appears at times to almost impose this on a particular text when the text would seem to imply something else.<sup>1</sup>

Most interpreters of Barth recognize with both admiration and criticism the "singleness of mind" with which Barth's "theological genius is concentrated all the time on one theme."<sup>2</sup> Daniel Jenkins believes that this is the reason why Barth is so often misinterpreted. His theme is always clear: It is to proclaim the initiative of God as the sovereign Lord in his self-revelation as found in the Bible. Barth proclaims this, furthermore, in such a way as to guard its significance against all the efforts of men to rest that initiative from God. It is this primary effort which keeps Barth from defining sufficiently the relation of what he is proclaiming to the world of men against whom he is defending God's revelation.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-51.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel Jenkins, Beyond Religion (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 14.

When he tries to say to the world, "The revelation is for you," he is hindered by having already said, "This is not 'your' revelation." What Barth means to say is, "It is not a revelation of your own making"; but it is taken to mean, "It is not a revelation which can concern you."

Jenkins correctly defines Barth's strength as well as his inadequacy. He sees Barth's emphasis upon the initiative of God as the sovereign Lord as making him "far more concerned to detect and to repel every possible threat to the sovereignty of God in his revelation than to try to define carefully the relation between that revelation and the other parts of human experience and knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

It is this typically Barthian emphasis that brings about the criticism that his theology is a "positivism of revelation."<sup>2</sup> Regin Prenter is correct in observing that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Regin Prenter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer und Karl Barth's Offenbarungspositivismus," Die mündige Welt 3 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1960), p. 12. Prenter says Bonhoeffer means by "positivism of revelation," "a proclamation of the revelation of God which presents its truths as postulates, without being able to make clear their relationship to the life of man in the world come of age." Ibid., p. 21. While accepting this criticism of Barth's theology, we must admit to a difference in viewpoint as responsible for the terminology of Bonhoeffer and Prenter in referring to Barth's work as a "positivism of revelation." Prenter applies this with a negative connotation, while many of Barth's contemporaries choose to regard his work as "concrete positivity" or in a positive tribute. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth, Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie (Köln: Jakob Hegner, 1962), p. 35. Hereafter cited as Karl Barth.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth in this regard is directed at a consistent feature within Barth's thought. The whole of Barth's theology is one of revelation, and revelation has the last word within it. Whether Barth is "uncomfortable" when he reads Bonhoeffer's analysis of a "world come of age," as Prenter suggests, is questionable. Bonhoeffer's new christological perspective of secular life and Christian faith is not completely unknown in Barth's own emphasis, although we shall examine this criticism later in the thesis. Bonhoeffer's remarks are revealing when he writes of Barth that he is the one who has "started on this line of thought" (a "religionless Christianity") but did not proceed to its logical conclusion, being "essentially a restoration."<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer recognized this direction in Barth's theology as early as 1944 and sees Barth's purpose then as a corrective one. What he did not live to see was the later Barth who, believing he had accomplished a restoration, did pursue this question to a further development, although not to the same conclusions as those of Bonhoeffer.

Barth's chosen hermeneutical principle is simply to subordinate, rather than deny, the critical method to the "Krisis" that he regards as central to theology. He says, "We have no desire to fetter or to cast suspicions upon the

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<sup>1</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1953), p. 92.



critical method. But it also cannot in the end survive the KRISIS, the sickness unto death, under which we stand."<sup>1</sup> Barth's principle is a belief in the authority of the Bible. He holds this belief, however, concurrently with a knowledge and use of the findings of form criticism. The difference between Barth and others who have had access to these findings is that he has not concluded that the Bible is any less authoritative because of the contributions of lower and higher criticism. It would be unfair to accuse Barth of "abandoning any attempt to use a hermeneutical principle" because he has not followed for instance the example of Bultmann's existential principle of demythologization. While those of the liberal tradition are unhappy because Barth has not adopted a particular conclusion from the findings of form criticism to their liking, there are others who credit Barth with "revitalizing" modern Protestant theology and biblical interpretation by the hermeneutical principle he did choose to use.<sup>2</sup> Barth's great influence and popularity among Roman Catholic theologians

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 148. In his early theology, Barth's vision of God causes him to see not only man but the whole temporal world stand forth in a moment sub specie mortis--in the light of death and judgment.

<sup>2</sup>Robert M. Grant, The Bible in the Church: A Short History of Interpretation (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), p. 161. He did so, points out Harold Dewolf, without literalism or uncritical methods of study. Harold Dewolf, Trends and Frontiers of Religious Thought (Tennessee: National Methodist Student Movement, 1955), p. 93. Hereafter cited as Trends and Frontiers.

is undoubtedly due in part to this feature of his theology. Hans Urs von Balthaser points to this characteristic of Barth's theology in glowing terms.<sup>1</sup>

The real weakness in Barth's principle of biblical interpretation is that he allows his total occupation with the "Krisis" to take him away from a proper concern for the historical itself, which he tends to identify with the critical method, so that he unwisely concludes that "the historical Abraham really does not concern us."<sup>2</sup> Barth's occupation with the sovereignty of God does not always allow him to hear what the very Word he is claiming allegiance to is saying about man and his world.

### The Sovereign Lord

Barth's determination to establish the absolute objectivity of the Word of God led him to rewrite the first volumes of the Church Dogmatics. Professor Torrance gives a somewhat sympathetic treatment of this change of Barth's epistemology in his discussion of Barth's admitted error of the use of an existential approach to the knowledge of God's Word, which Torrance interprets as an anthropological approach,<sup>3</sup> and Barth calls showing reverence to false gods.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>von Balthaser, Karl Barth, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup>Torrance, Karl Barth, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 142.

This new approach came to Barth from his study of Anselm from whom he discovered a new, and in his consideration, proper attitude to the problem of the knowledge of God and the scientific method appropriate to the interpretation of this knowledge. Barth came to prefer this method over an existential approach to the problem of epistemology<sup>1</sup> and it was to become the new method of his theological approach.

The rejection of his first attempt at the Dogmatics and Barth's new start is a deliberate rejection of any possibility of beginning from the human side in an effort to understand or interpret the Word of God. Barth's own references bear out his confession of the impossibility of such an attempt ever being genuine.<sup>2</sup> Barth turned even more toward the Word and set out to interpret the Word of God in the most concrete and positive way, strictly in terms of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This led him to introduce fundamental modifications in his understanding of both the content and method of his theology.<sup>3</sup> The repudiation of his earlier philosophical approach to the understanding of the Word of God was not a denial of the legitimate use of philosophy as terminology for the exposition of its theme. This is admitted by Barth as long as it maintains the theological theme and content

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-48.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-47, passim, 141ff., 213ff.

<sup>3</sup>von Balthaser, Karl Barth, pp. 92-123.

proper to theology--the reality of God.<sup>1</sup> He regarded his own earlier attempt as a wrong use of philosophy because he had endeavored to understand and interpret the Word from the situation of the hearer, rather than from the Word itself.

Barth's conclusion is that the Word of God must be interpreted in the most positive and concrete way, in terms of the person of Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man. The fact that he rejected his own attempts at an existential interpretation of the Word in favor of a christological one leads him to the limitation of the role of theology to knowing "the Word of God only at second hand, only in the mirror and echo of the Biblical witness."<sup>2</sup> Man's answer must come from outside of himself. This is what Barth sees in Anselm. Barth says to regard Anselm as an exponent of human reason in theology, as is often done, is to misunderstand him. He claims his own particular view of Anselm is one in which Thomas Aquinas and Kant "were at one in their misunderstanding and denial" of. Barth says that in interpreting Anselm he is working with the vital key to an understanding in his Church Dogmatics of that process of thought which is "the only one proper to theology."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Christliche Dogmatik, I, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, trans. by Grover Foley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. by Ian W. Robertson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960),

Barth interprets Anselm as rejecting speculation that does not respect the incomprehensibility of the reality of the object of faith, as recognizing the indirectness of all knowledge of God, and as referring to the pattern of faith which is the basis of everything: "In laying hold of the Word Anselm has left behind him the unbridgeable gulf between an understanding of the divine Being that can be attained if need be without faith and the affirmation of this Being carried out in spite of, and with, the basic inconceivability of its 'quomodo.'"<sup>1</sup>

Barth sees that behind Anselm's "proofs" is his "intelligere"--his theological scheme. Anselm's concern in all his writings, says Barth, is theology--the "intellectus fidei."<sup>2</sup> Barth sees Anselm's position as stating that it is not the existence of faith but rather the nature of faith that desires knowledge, and faith does not come about without something new encountering us and happening to us from

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p. 11. Barth's characteristic ability to reach back into the past to reappreciate the positive virtue of theology's past masters is acknowledged by some to be the mark of his greatness and others see it as identifying Barth with a pre-modern era, and therefore not relevant for the needs of contemporary man.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 16. This is also Barth's earliest concern, by which he means the interpretation of Scripture. He tells us that it dates back to his first real interest in theology which resulted from his confirmation studies when he was thirteen years old.

outside.<sup>1</sup> God alone is objective reality.<sup>2</sup> Barth's summary of Anselm is reflected in its influence throughout the Dogmatics:

God gave himself as the object of his knowledge and God illumined him that he might know him as object. Apart from this event there is no proof of the existence, that is of the reality of God. But in the power of this event there is a proof which is worthy of gratitude. It is truth that has spoken and not man in search of faith. Man might now want faith. Man might remain always a fool. As we hear, it is of grace if he does not. But even if he did, . . . truth has spoken--in such a way that man is forbidden and to that extent is unable not to recognize it. Just because it is the science of faith about faith, theology possesses light but it is not the light of the theologian's faith.<sup>3</sup>

The thing that seems to have almost compelling influence upon Barth is Anselm's argument that the "Intellectus Fidei" must be knowledge given to man by God, and it can consist only of positive meditation on the object of faith.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental meaning of "intelligere" in Anselm is "legere"---to reflect upon what has already been said in the Credo. This understanding must be sought in prayer and by the persistent application of his intellectual powers. He will not seek it anywhere outside of or apart from the revealed Credo of the Church and certainly not apart from or outside of Holy Scripture.

Thus, the overriding theme of the rewritten Volume One

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

of the Church Dogmatics (both parts one and two) is Barth's attempt to establish the absolute and unchallenged objectivity of the Word of God. It is a Word which is to be subject to nothing but itself. The starting point of theology is not man, not even an attempt to determine the being of man; the starting point is God himself in his self-contained revelation.<sup>1</sup> The "distinctive utterance" of dogmatics is God.<sup>2</sup> God is the content of revelation and the subject of dogmatics. Theology and the church are to examine themselves by this one source and object. Theology remains under the judgment of this source. It speaks as a human "utterance concerning God," but stands under judgment of the one of whom it speaks.<sup>3</sup>

Theology stands and falls with the Word of God. . . . Should they wish to be more or less or anything other than action in response to that Word, its thinking and speaking would be empty, meaningless, and futile.<sup>4</sup>

The Word witnesses to the covenant of God with man, in which he is man's friend, but also his Lord and judge. He is the primary partner of the covenant. He discloses himself as "man's God. But he also discloses man to be his creature, the debtor who, confronting him, is unable to pay."<sup>5</sup> Man is thus lost in God's judgment and saved in his grace. Man is

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, pp. 39-40, 143-44, 217-26, passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

the other, the secondary partner of the covenant in which God is man's God and man is God's man.

The Bible, or the canon of Old and New Testament texts of Scripture, contains the authoritative witness to the reality of God, and theology must be subject to that witness, as to the source itself.<sup>1</sup> This becomes the basis for Barth's argument of the "exclusiveness of the biblical witness" so that we know nothing of God apart from that witness, and apart from the revelation of God through Jesus, to whom the Bible witnesses.<sup>2</sup> We do not know God as even creator apart from Jesus. There is no such thing, therefore, as natural theology. The only theology recognized by Barth is biblical theology. Any idea of God from any other source is an idol, not because it is an idea but because of its claim to be an idea of God when it could not be because it did not come from the Bible. This seems a rather thin argument by Barth, but he allows no compromise, even to the degree of admitting that natural theology itself may have come indirectly from the primary source. Jesus, according to Barth, did not affirm and reinterpret the god already known to the world, and invest him with the name of Father, but rather he revealed the "unknown" Father--the only true and real God.<sup>3</sup> Barth rejects everything apart from this one revelation as belonging to

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, pp. 113-24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 448-54, passim.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 448.



the "religion" of the world, and religion is unbelief.<sup>1</sup> It is a substitute for revelation.

The fact that the revelation of God is identical to the Word of God means not only that the Word is to be regarded as a final authority but also that the Word has as its subject God and not man.<sup>2</sup> It is this revelation that is in Jesus Christ. This early emphasis seems to imply that revelation of the divine transcendence is identical with the belief in the divine revelation. One of the earliest American critics of Karl Barth, Professor Wilhelm Pauk, objected in 1931 that this concept of revelation exposed the contradictory character of Barth's entire endeavor in that having God as its subject it could not be a genuine revelation. He writes:

Thus God himself is subject, predicate and object of the sentence, God speaks. God alone, he himself exclusively, is the revealer; he alone is the agent of revelation, and he alone its content. How could the absolute subjectivity of God be more definitely affirmed? How could his absolute transcendence, his incomprehensibility be more drastically expressed?<sup>3</sup>

Pauk says that Barth seeks to retain the otherness even in his Christology, with the result that Jesus Christ is occasionally depicted as the revealer of God's inaccessibility.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Christliche Dogmatik, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Pauk, Karl Barth, Prophet of a New Christianity? (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1931), p. 174. Hereafter cited as Karl Barth.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

One must bear in mind Barth's own numerous mention of the development of his thoughts since this early emphasis--not so much in saying anything materially different now than then, but in the way he would express his ideas and the direction of his concerns. Also heed should be paid to Barth's plea that one read and interpret him as a whole. Barth has always been interested in man, but from the standpoint of revelation, and he has much positive theology in this regard, especially in his more recent works. Nevertheless, this very early criticism of Barth by Professor Pauk is still a valid consideration that his theology must overcome. It questions whether Barth is justified in his insistence that God, who in order to be God, must be conceived as the transcendent Deity even after he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Man needs God, opposite to himself as Barth insists, but not outside his life (and he is outside, whether above or beyond). Barth's early theology would almost place God outside of man's existence: "God is eternally Subject and never object, . . . he determines himself and is knowable exclusively through himself in 'pure act' (actus purissimus) of his Triune Personality."<sup>1</sup> Barth is of course desiring to maintain that revelation is an act of God and not man's discovery, but he pushes toward the extreme in this regard. His classic

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, Theology and Church, trans. by L. P. Smith, with an Introduction by T. F. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 256.

statement:

It is this that I call the Bible's other-worldliness, its unhistoricalness, its antipathy to the idea of sacredness. God is the new, incomparable, unattainable, not only heavenly but more than heavenly interest. . . . He can satisfy no other needs than his own. . . . He is not a thing among other things, but the Wholly Other.<sup>1</sup>

Barth recognizes that God must come to man but he insists that God remain the divinely Other, even in the event that brings him to man. Can this be? There is some possibility that the renewed interest in the historical Jesus may have arisen out of the despair of knowing nothing else with which man could identify if the divinely Other remains such even in his revelation in Jesus Christ.

It should also be acknowledged that Pauk's criticism of Barth, like others of like mind---whether valid or invalid---stemmed from his own modernistic and liberal position. He reflects this when he asks, "Why must the church be founded upon a Christology which is cluttered with elements of supernaturalistic superstition?"<sup>2</sup> He rejects Barth as not being a "thoroughly contemporary leader," and "speaking in too bluntly supernaturalistic terms," and reflecting a "staunch Biblicism."<sup>3</sup>

Pauk's criticism does help to evaluate the more recent allegations that Barth is not a thoroughly contemporary

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Word of God, pp. 73-74.

<sup>2</sup>Pauk, Karl Barth, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

leader. If one is to base such a criticism of Barth upon the supernaturalistic elements within his theology, then he is simply back to the beginning of the argument. There is no question that the objection to Barth's theology in many circles is based upon just such a premise whether acknowledged or not. Most of the early criticism of Barth's work centered around his view of inspiration, and his own opinion of it was that it had "missed the mark"<sup>1</sup> and had not touched upon the chief weaknesses of his work. If, however, it can be found that Barth's lack of relevance is his failure to make revelation a meaningful divine-human encounter (meaningful from the standpoint of man's humanity), then there is hope of progress. Pauk was able to sense both the strength and weakness of Barth's endeavor, and presented what was really at the time a rather remarkable and fair analysis of Barth's position. He wrote:

The chief weakness of Barth's theology is that it does not present a theological anthropology; it merely gives promise of it. Its merit is that it brings out clearly that in Christianity God must always be subject, the opposite, that he must take possession of us, that we can never take possession of him.<sup>2</sup>

Hans Urs von Balthasar sees Barth as engrossed in the object of faith.

And Barth's object is God as he has revealed himself to the world in Jesus Christ according to the biblical

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Pauk, Karl Barth, pp. 192-93.

witness. Because Barth . . . looks away altogether from the state of faith itself to its material content, because he commits himself to a strict theological objectivism . . . and thereby differentiates himself in the sharpest way from the Neo-Protestantism of Schleiermacher, he speaks well and without any suspicion of pietistic edifying.<sup>1</sup>

### The Image of God in Man

It is Balthaser, the sympathetic interpreter of Barth, who offers one of the most corrective insights into Barth's theology. And it is Barth who is strongest in the area of Balthaser's chief weakness. The point at which Balthaser can help Barth most is in a greater appreciation for and understanding of man--in his understanding that man himself has transcended the secular world and the world of things. They can no longer be God for him. They are below him. This is also the point where Balthaser falls into his own greatest weakness and is the very point that Barth has so skillfully criticized in liberal theology. Balthaser reflects an almost naive optimism in thinking that man "has come to know himself sufficiently to have no more desire to worship himself."<sup>2</sup> Barth's understanding of human nature is a more realistic one and would not only question that man has no more desire to worship himself but would point to his universal tendency to

<sup>1</sup>von Balthaser, Karl Barth, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Urs von Balthaser, The God Question and Modern Man, trans. by Hilda Graef, with an Introduction by John Macquarrie (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 142. Hereafter cited as The God Question.

do so as a fundamental characteristic of his nature.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, Balthaser's view of human dignity as an innate quality, given him by God and not completely destroyed by sin,<sup>2</sup> is a superior understanding to Barth's view of humanity as hopelessly apart from God outside of his revelation in Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> This gives man's secular history and culture a relevance missing in Barth's theology.

For Barth, the movement toward man is always grounded "in God and from God"<sup>4</sup> which is a self-limiting concept. Balthaser's view of man's dignity is more than an exalted humanity and man becoming "God-like." It is the transcendent God who makes all human relationships possible on this deeper level.<sup>5</sup> Man by his very nature has the superiority that God

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<sup>1</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr's contribution to Barthian theology in America is his penetrating understanding of the sinful pretensions of man and his society which he brings into the light of God's judgment. See Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), and Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, A Christian Interpretation, Vol. I: Human Nature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941). Hereafter cited as Nature of Man.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Urs von Balthaser, Word and Revelation, trans. by A. V. Littledale (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), p. 94. Balthaser (p. 108) challenges the idea of a completely lost "image" with the thought that, "If there were no remembrance of a lost origin, how could mankind look back to it constantly through all the vicissitudes of history?"

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 18-19, 92ff.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Philippians, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1962), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>von Balthaser, Word and Revelation, p. 31.

by his purpose and initiative intended and created him to have. Balthaser is able to say that because man is important as a creature of God (with an emphasis on God rather than creature), because he transcends the world of things, man's history is important and meaningful. He is thus able to hold a concept of history that seems superior to Barth's problematic view. Balthaser does not limit history to secular history but at the same time he does not exalt it to an unknowable position. He says:

Rather, we take the word (history) to indicate the entire involved complex of temporal events that can never be wholly of a public nature, since their deepest currents belong to the personal domain, or purely secular, since their strongest driving forces derive from a philosophical or religious commitment, from a man's belief or unbelief, love or hate, hope in one direction or another or refusal of hope. A purely secular view of history is quite impossible. Historical science may attempt to be neutral as regards the philosophy of history but it cannot controvert the fact that its subject--man . . . conducts himself . . . according to his basic idea of ultimate meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Professor John Macquarrie recognizes this superiority in Balthaser's appreciation for historical significance and calls it "realistic" in that "it recognizes that Christian theology, as a historical phenomenon, cannot discard its history."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. This concept of history from the standpoint of persons is an existential view of history that has tremendous strength toward harmonizing history with a Christian view of man. Balthaser uses the words "religious" and "philosophical" almost synonymously and thus gives "philosophical" attempts and experiences a much greater significance than does Barth.

<sup>2</sup>von Balthaser, The God Question, p. xi.

Balthaser's view of man and history allows him to say that God speaks his word within man<sup>1</sup> in such a way as to indicate a much more real participation than Barth is able to convey. Even in his more recent shift of interest in this direction, Barth's interpretation of man is such that makes him more of an object than a participant in the act of God's revelation.

Barth says, "We could not speak of the sovereignty of the Word of God . . . without immediately speaking also of ourselves, namely of the decision of faith."<sup>2</sup> What Barth means by the "decision of faith," however, is totally different to what Balthaser would describe. While Barth stresses that it is the very nature of the sovereign act of God that it is directed toward man (an act where the true God became the true man), he interprets man's participation in this act of God the fact that we are the objects and recipients of his power, love, et cetera.<sup>3</sup> But is this participation? Barth's view of man and his world would make it difficult for man to be much more than an object and recipient of God's act. Barth says that it would be a denial of God to leave man out of the picture, but is it not a denial of man (and perhaps even a denial of God) to interpret his participation as being nothing more

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<sup>1</sup>von Balthaser, Word and Revelation, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, God Here and Now, trans. by Paul M. van Buren (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



than a recipient?

Barth makes a remarkable admission, in the light of his overall emphasis, in saying that man's self-understanding can lead to a lessening of his opposition to God.<sup>1</sup> Because he can gain a measure of self-understanding from his neighbor, that other person becomes a bearer and representative of God's grace. Barth says: "Grace certainly does not live and move abstractly, nor transcendently: it comes to meet us in life, in the efforts, hopes, insights, concerns of those about me, in whose company I stand before God as an individual, by whom indeed I am set before God as an individual."<sup>2</sup>

Barth goes so far as to say that the divine reality of God meets man in the "garment" of the "unintelligible subjective aspect" of one's neighbor,<sup>3</sup> in that the claims that man's neighbor makes upon him is the claim of God. It should be noted that Barth is treating exegetically the message of Philippians, chapter two, but in this book--first published in Germany in 1927--Barth pays unmistakable tribute to the "grace" within man. It would seem that his own theological system simply will not allow him to develop this understanding.

He goes on to speak of the "decision of faith" as being the human correspondent to the Word of God, but it is

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Philippians, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

not man who decides,<sup>1</sup> even though the decision takes place on earth.<sup>2</sup> The decision of faith is presented in such a way as to say man must obey and submit to the divine decision. The decision of faith is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit, and his work is irresistible.<sup>3</sup>

Barth makes his case clear at this point in that he undoubtedly sees his entire theological emphasis at stake in the decision presented to man. Any other interpretation, such as making the decision man's decision, would reduce the entire act, according to Barth, to something less than the real thing,<sup>4</sup> so that "the decision of faith is the necessary proclamation of, and witness to, the Sovereignty of God's Word,"<sup>5</sup> which is also "the proclamation of true manhood, of true humanity."<sup>6</sup>

Barth thus maintains his fundamental principle of not only the freedom and initiative of God but his absolute sovereignty, but is this a true humanity? It may be what Barth thinks of as a true humanity, or what humanity should be, but it is not the humanity that most people are familiar with, the kind mankind lives with and that which makes up the

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, God Here and Now, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, God Here and Now, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

history around him.

In contrast to Barth, Balthaser allows his concept of the Word to become totally human and says, "Since the word of God is directed to the whole of mankind as the offspring of God, nothing human is alien to it."<sup>1</sup> Every human situation can be brought to bear "by referring back to the creation and its word and forward to the judgments on the world and the resurrection of the whole history in God."<sup>2</sup> This view allows the Word to touch both the natural and the supernatural elements of man's history, and as such it illumines so-called natural religion.<sup>3</sup>

Balthaser is thus able to conclude that "the development of man's awareness of the unity of the human race, which we call 'progress' is intimately connected with revelation."<sup>4</sup> Balthaser's weakness is again apparent when he connects revelation only with progress, when in reality it should be connected with the entire secular world with or without progress. Balthaser's hope for progress and unity is not always one to be realized, but the very fact that he is able to associate revelation with man and his secular history is a necessary improvement over Barth's narrow view of revelation.

Balthaser sees a convergence, although not identity of "natural" and "supernatural" progress,<sup>5</sup> so that the

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<sup>1</sup> von Balthaser, Word and Revelation, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 114n.

development of secular history is not in opposition or conflict with revelation. He views revelation as adapting itself to the level of a culture while at the same time transcending it. It can do so, therefore, without compromising itself--God remains free and absolute subject.

Balthaser's Christology has the same quality of strength that is reflected in his treatment of the relationship between revelation and history. He remarks that "between the divine and human natures of Christ nothing is discordant,"<sup>1</sup> in a way similar to his view that nothing is discordant between the divine revelation and historical, secular man. The difficulty in trying to accomplish such a unity is highlighted, however, in Balthaser's emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus. He writes that revelation is not beyond our reach or understanding because

all this happens in a simple human life with nothing exceptional about it save an ardent love for the father and for men . . . for there was nothing here which world history could take cognizance of: only a man, the son of man. Nevertheless in Jesus, a man unique and aware of his uniqueness, the word of God reached men.<sup>2</sup>

One must ask, what was the uniqueness that Jesus was aware of? And how then can it be said that there was nothing exceptional about his life? How does one explain the ardent love for the father and for men in terms of a simple human life? It is obvious that Balthaser has problems in the very

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-19.

area where Barth is strongest, while possessing strengths lacking in Barth. It may be, however, that whether Balthaser is successful in maintaining the uniqueness of Christ in a simple human life, or maintaining God as absolute subject while becoming involved in and adapting himself to man's world is not as important as the fact that Balthaser has successfully brought revelation into a meaningful relationship with the historical-cultural world in a way that Barth has not been able to do while successfully maintaining the absolute sovereignty of God. It may come down to a choice between a sovereign God removed from the real history of man or a less than sovereign Lord who by self-limitation invades human history.

### Natural Theology

Barth's central theme with regard to God's revelation is that this revelation means the "abolition of religion."<sup>1</sup> Faith is the response to God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, a revelation in which the initiative rests completely with God. Religion is man's quest for God, and if it had been sufficient, revelation would have been unnecessary. Revelation is, therefore, the condemnation and denial of religion with this broad interpretation. Barth, in commenting upon the religion of the Gentiles referred to by Paul in Romans 1, rejects

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<sup>1</sup>See Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," pp. 280-361.

the possibility of the knowledge of God coming from any such source.

If there is any position from which no bridge can possibly be built to the gospel, to the knowledge of the living God, then this is it! Human religion, as radically distinguished from belief in God's revelation, always originates and consists in this confusion: in the mistaken confidence in which man wants to decide for himself who and what God is . . . it is the essence of man's opposition to God.<sup>1</sup>

Revelation is a gift that man receives while religion is something he creates. If he believed,

he would accept a gift; but in religion he takes something for himself. If he did, he would let God Himself intercede for God; but in religion he ventures to grasp at God.<sup>2</sup>

Barth does not deny the universal expression of religion or that faith arises out of the soil of human religion and is in that sense a religious act. His emphasis is upon the singular source of revelation and man's dependence upon the initiative of God. Even the admission by Barth that faith is in some sense a religious act, and the fact that he speaks of the Christian faith as a "true religion"<sup>3</sup> (because it is formed and sustained by divine revelation), makes one question Barth's refusal to develop further the question of natural revelation. The fact that Barth can speak of a true religion means that Christian faith becomes in that sense a comparative

<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, Shorter Commentary on Romans, pp. 29-30.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 331-33ff.

religion that must justify itself and relate itself in the world of other religions even though it claims superiority. The claim of superiority must itself be defended.

Emil Brunner---in contrast to Barth---has shown a willingness to appreciate the historical process of man's existence which, if given the right expression, would be an improvement over Barth. Brunner, for example, sees the possibility of the Holy Spirit illuminating man so that he can appreciate the nature of the good where it is to be found in culture and history. He shares Barth's conviction that no other knowledge of God is given except what has been given in the "Word made flesh," but he speaks of an "operative revelation" now taking place through the living word, by which he means the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Brunner rejects what he regards as a "false natural theology" but seeks for the establishment of a point of contact which leads him to the development of a "true" theologia naturalis. Barth cries an angry No! to his whole attempt and regards it as a betrayal of his entire intent.<sup>2</sup>

The attempt by Brunner is a basic departure from Barth's original and unique emphasis upon the detachment of revelation from any other source but itself and is more than

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<sup>1</sup>Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, trans. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, Natural Theology, trans. by Peter Fraenkel, with an Introduction by Professor John Baillie (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), p. 71. Hereafter cited as Natural Theology.

simply a "philosophical bent"<sup>1</sup> as is sometimes observed. Barth's reason for rejecting such an attempt is clear. The fundamental emphasis of his theology is that any point of contact must come from outside of man if it is to be genuine. His reply to Brunner in 1934 was that "man has no capacity for revelation."<sup>2</sup>

Brunner's moderation in this area has been an increasing one, and while it has resulted in his rejection by Barth, it has brought about a better communication with the liberal direction of American theology. He has been more hospitable

<sup>1</sup>M. Channing-Pearce, The Terrible Crystal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 59. The fact that through this emphasis Brunner has helped to "spread the gospel of Barthianism in England and America" is an accomplishment not admired by Barth because it is not the "Barthianism" that he espouses. He decries the idea of any kind of Barthianism anyway, but he is concerned to maintain the uniqueness of his emphasis upon the absolute and utter distinctness of God's revelation. It is here that Barth's genius lies, and it is here that he is most often misunderstood and thereby misinterpreted. It is probably true that Brunner's position in this regard has given him a greater influence than Barth in the United States. See Charles S. McFarland, Current Religious Thought: A Digest (New York: Fleming Revell Company, 1941), p. 174. It is a difference which has allowed Brunner, according to Harold Dewolf, to be "much more congenial to the American mind than . . . Karl Barth." Dewolf, Trends and Frontiers, p. 77. Carl Henry points out that Brunner's admission of the possibility of "general revelation" automatically allowed a greater interaction between theological and philosophical problems, and claims that for this reason the recent theology of English and Scottish origin follows more in the tradition of Brunner than Barth. Carl Henry, Fifty Years of Protestant Theology (Boston: W. A. Wild Company, 1950), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>Brunner and Barth, Natural Theology, p. 127.



to some of the conclusions accepted by the liberal tradition which could be part of the reason why Barth attacks Brunner's position with the same sense of urgency that he demonstrated in the early days of his theology in rejecting the liberalism of the nineteenth century. Barth regards this new attempt by Brunner to be nothing more than a restatement of the old attempt, and both of them are seeking grounds upon which man can rest his faith apart from the divine revelation.

If Barth is correct in maintaining that Brunner's position denies the sovereignty of God's revelation in Christ, then it is understandable why he would reject it. If, however, Brunner is maintaining, as he claims he is, the full authority of revelation but at the same time is able to find meaning and value in man's world, then his position is superior to that of Barth. Barth believes one cannot have both. One cannot maintain God's sovereignty and do what Brunner is attempting to do. It possibly can be accomplished, but Brunner's expression is not the best basis upon which to attempt it. Brunner's failure is really a matter of sacrificing the strength of Barth's original argument in an effort to give dignity to natural revelation. Instead of directing the revelation of God in Christ into and upon the natural world, Brunner gives a sort of secondary value to natural theology. Rather than it becoming an indirect source from the one primary source of the biblical revelation, it becomes itself a

kind of primary source, although of secondary value. It is here that Barth's criticism is directed. If his theology has taught us any lesson it is this: that revelation and reality itself--that God can have only one source and that source is his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth may have isolated that source unnecessarily, but he defines it well.

A more authentic expression in this direction is the unfinished work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>1</sup> For him, Jesus Christ is the heart of nature, and, because of this, nature is not alien to God. Human existence is always history and always nature. He says, "Christ is indeed the center of human existence, the center of history and now, too, the center of nature."<sup>2</sup> We do not move from nature to God--and here Bonhoeffer is free from the liberal weakness and is faithful to the Barthian premise--but because Christ is known, we can recognize him in nature. He thus gives a freedom to Christ that allows him a greater degree of relevance to nature, history, and culture than Barth would allow. Bonhoeffer's Christ

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<sup>1</sup>We must remember that Bonhoeffer's position is an incomplete and fragmentary one. He would without doubt have encountered many of the problems faced by Brunner and others had he attempted to fully develop his concerns. He is thus a prophetic voice, pointing with promise toward an area where theology must dare to walk but pointing also to the place where it must begin and in this he is a student of Barth.

<sup>2</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, trans. by John Bowden, with an Introduction by Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 67.

is known. He is in the world. Barth's Christ is only known in the world where faith is present.

It is important to note that Bonhoeffer's interest in the natural world is one that follows a genuine understanding and appreciation for Barth's emphasis upon the authority of the Word of God. He shares with Barth the conviction that the Word interprets theology.<sup>1</sup> The more contemporary efforts in Bonhoeffer's direction of concern, although many of them profess to follow his line of thought, fail at this point--they neglect to embrace Barth's God, who is also Bonhoeffer's God, at his source in the Word of God.

It must be admitted that Barth has done an invaluable service in calling men from "the mockery of trying to enter the truth of God from the standpoint of the spectator,"<sup>2</sup> but with Bonhoeffer one must question Barth's right to insist that man cannot participate with God and still participate in the world in which he not only lives but exists. His very being is essentially related to the world around him, and it is difficult to see how Barth can be true to the existential concept that he appreciates in Kierkegaard and continue to deny man his real role in the historical process of life. To fail to appreciate this is to fail to appreciate that God himself participates in the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Holmes Rolston, A Conservative Looks to Barth and Brunner (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938), p. 54.

Summary of Barth's Early Theology

It may be that what conservative James Stewart points toward as the positive feature of Barth's theology is in fact its greatest problem and weakness. Stewart says, "It is one of the great services of the Barthian movement to our generation that it keeps up an energetic protest against what it regards as a quite arrogant tendency to push systems and definition into that ultimate region where God alone can speak."<sup>1</sup> The problem arises, of course, when God speaks. Whenever this occurs, as Barth assures that it does, then we are immediately concerned with definition and systems, whether it be the Church Dogmatics, or some other expression. Barth's dogmatism would bring all ordinary historical thought and ethical ideas into contempt. I. G. Matthews says, "Barthianism is frankly dogmatic in its claims to interpret the Protestant position and criticize all who disagree."<sup>2</sup> Barth would not admit to such a claim, but Daniel Jenkins notes that Barth is a theologian who at times "speaks like the Pope."<sup>3</sup>

Barth's dogmatism is positive when it defends the biblical revelation against human error, but it is negative and

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<sup>1</sup>James Stuart Stewart, A Man in Christ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>A. Stewart Woodburne, "Book Reviews," review of The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, by Emil Brunner, in The Crozer Quarterly, XIV (1937), 337.

<sup>3</sup>Jenkins, Beyond Religion, p. 31.

unjust when it interprets all other areas of knowledge as in conflict with that revelation. One must admit to the possibility that God places truth in the world in ways outside the biblical revelation, and this Barth seems intent on denying. In denying this, however, he is denying the same freedom that he passionately defends as belonging to God. E. L. Allen asks this question,

But are we justified in thus assuming that God only wills to be known by means of some direct communication with us on His part? May it not be that God would prefer us sometimes to find out this truth for ourselves than to receive it from him as a gift?<sup>1</sup>

There is simply too much knowledge in the world consistent with the biblical revelation, but not necessarily identical to it, to deny that God is the ultimate and absolute source for it and thereby affirm its authenticity. If God and truth are not to be placed in opposition, then one must recognize God when recognizing truth, whether it be psychological, scientific, historical, or biblical truth.

Barth would not admit to the following paraphrase, but it has some merit: If a man were to try to understand and interpret the sun from its rays of light or the heat it engenders, would he not be justified in claiming that he was dealing with reality and not symbol? For another man to argue that neither the rays of the sun nor its heat were really the

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<sup>1</sup>E. L. Allen, "Christian Doctrine of God," Hibert Journal, XLVIII (July, 1950), 408.

sun would not make invalid the information and knowledge gained from these media, precisely because they do proceed from the concrete reality of the sun. Barth's total rejection of natural theology would at times face him with this kind of argument.

Barth hurts his own case when he rejects all other forms of theology because they are not grounded in the biblical revelation, by which he sometimes means that they are not interpreted in such a way as to give evidence of such grounding. Some theology that falls under Barth's condemnation are possibly founded upon that revelation while not agreeing with the fundamentals of Barthian theology. Rather than appreciate the need for all approaches to theology, Barth seeks to exclude all others because they do not satisfy the particular interest of his approach which for him is decisive. This type of intellectual exclusiveness will tend to discredit his theology. Theologians must be modest in the claims of the finality of their systems, as Barth has shown himself to be,<sup>1</sup> but

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<sup>1</sup>Barth does not want to be regarded as authoring a "timeless" theology. He is pointing to what he regards as the only legitimate source for theology, and he regards the direction he is pointing toward as the only right one and as more important than his interpretations. He recognizes his role as an interpreter. (See Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, p. 730.) He knows he must place himself under the same judgment that he places all other theologies and interpretations under--that of the revealed Word which comes to us eternally and forever new in Jesus Christ. He does not consider the Dogmatics to be the conclusion of his theology but merely the initiation of a new exchange of views. (See Foreword to Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction.)

he has allowed his enthusiasm for defending the finality of the biblical revelation to influence his own conclusions. Barth's own insistence that every age must reopen and re-examine the conclusions of those preceding it precludes the possibility of claiming absoluteness for anything but God himself.

Another area where Barth's emphasis upon the exclusiveness of God leads him into weakness is that of the doctrine of justification. His existential approach to this doctrine, along with his emphasis on the otherness of God, tends to leave the individual somewhat defenseless and cut off. Like other forms of existentialism, it confronts each person with the uniqueness and loneliness of the personal life but it does not offer an invitation to come and find God. It is a warning rather not to look for God but to let him find you. Each individual is left at the mercy of God's initiative. He must wait on God to act when, according to the very revelation that Barth is maintaining, God has already acted. Barth seems to take what could be regarded as a hyper-Calvinistic position in not allowing for a more human response to the divine act of God in Christ. Consequently, there is in Barth's theology no dynamic evangelistic appeal to a sinful world. The promise and Yes of Barth's theology is overshadowed by the threat and judgment of God's terrible exclusiveness which tends to imply No even when Barth wants it to say Yes.

The crisis in Barth's theology is in this sense an extreme one. The distance between God and man is more than majestic; it is impossible. There is a meeting between God and man, but, because of the impossible differences in them, it is one of sheer terror for man. This emphasis is such as to produce a saving crisis, according to Barth. The recognition that "man is not God" is not in itself the removal of judgment, because

in the moment when we dare to say we believe, we remain always under suspicion. The necessity of passing through the narrow gate which leads from life to death and from death to life must remain always a sheer impossibility and a sheer necessity. . . . It is dangerous to take even one step forward.<sup>1</sup>

It is critically revealing that Barth selects one of the brightest moments of New Testament promise to emphasize the crisis element in his view of faith: Romans 5:1, "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This promise becomes in the hands of Barth's somewhat forced interpretation a terrifying crisis instead of a reassuring promise. He substitutes uncertainty for what most would interpret as a joyful and positive promise. The promise is never fully realized, as Barth's treatment of this passage will indicate:

The bitter conflict between flesh and spirit remains as intense as before; man remains man, and God is still God. Nor is the necessity of faith removed, for the tension of the paradox remains without even the slightest

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 150.



easement. Men are compelled to wait and only to wait; . . . . By faith, however, their waiting is a waiting upon God alone; and this is to be at peace with Him.<sup>1</sup>

One must ask, What kind of peace is this? It is without the joyful optimism that should pervade all of theology if it is indeed to be good news.

Barth makes clear what he is reacting from when he writes: "The comfortable and easy manner in which men advance towards this critical point is the primary curse which lies upon all, or upon almost all dogmatic preaching, and is the lie, the poison, which it is so difficult to eradicate from the pastoral work of the Church."<sup>2</sup> Barth's alternative is too extreme, however, to be in harmony with the very Word to which he would have us submit.

His theology is weak in calling men to a positive faith in God. It is weak, in fact, in the whole doctrinal area of justification by faith. Brunner, by comparison, while showing a readiness to appreciate general revelation and its consequent availability to man, still emphasizes the absolute sinfulness of man more than Barth and at the same time has a greater emphasis upon justification by faith.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 150. It should be remembered that this is the emphasis of Barth's early theology. He later reflects an entirely new direction which will be examined in the following chapter.

<sup>3</sup>A. O. Knudson, "The Barthian Ethic," The Crozer Quarterly, XII (1935), 335.

Barth's man in contrast is never really justified. He remains always under the condemnation of Barth's scorching treatment in his early commentary on Romans. He can never hope to find good in the world around him or in the historical-cultural process of his civilization.

Barth's theology could be accepted more readily if he did not leave man in a continual state of crisis. Can man really be considered justified if this is so? Barth's answer is that man's state of crisis is his justification in that he is judged, condemned, and forgiven in that moment. But only, it appears, if he continues in the crisis position. It is difficult to appreciate the existential possibility of being judged and condemned and forgiven in the same moment and that moment remain suspended. It would seem that forgiveness would follow judgment in a subsequent stage, and, if so, man is no longer being condemned when he is forgiven, but this is not the case in Barth's theology. David Soper notes this weakness and says that neo-orthodoxy does not leave room for the possibility of victory over sin and denies the improbability of the human lot and the ushering in of a better day for humanity.<sup>1</sup> The need for something more concrete and definite, with greater hope to natural man, is evident in the response to

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<sup>1</sup>Edmond Davison Soper, The Religion of Mankind (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1921), p. 242.

Barth's theology from almost every direction.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's conclusion continues to be that

faith and revelation expressly deny that there is any way from man to God and to God's grace, love, and life. Both words indicate that the only way between God and man is that which leads from God to man. Between these words . . . there are two other words: Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Barth again leaves a dialectic, however, when he insists that even the revelation of Christ leaves man without a human certainty, "for it is not our certainty, but God's."<sup>3</sup> Although man's salvation is certain, Barth is so intent on maintaining God's sovereignty that man is left with a crisis that is not consistent with the positive reassurance that he not only demands and needs but that the gospel gives him a right to expect.

It is impossible to maintain Barth's perspective and inquire into the nature of faith. Barth's answer is that we ought not to be inquiring into the nature of faith to start with. This would point again to an anthropocentric beginning.

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<sup>1</sup>A. W. Phinney, religious news editor for The Christian Science Monitor, voices this plea in reviewing Barth's Evan-  
gelical Theology: An Introduction:

"Barth's limitation of the role of theology to knowing 'the Word of God only at second hand, only in the mirror and echo of the Biblical witness,' will not do. The human heart cries out for the perspective of Paul as possible, practical and immediate: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' (II Cor. 3:18.)" (The Christian Science Monitor, January 31, 1963.)

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Word of God, pp. 179-80.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

Faith is from above.<sup>1</sup> It is revealed as God is revealed. If we argue that scripture is history and not revelation, Barth would agree but would maintain that the revelation which is within scripture is not history<sup>2</sup> (not the kind of history which can be examined by scientific-historical methods). The question which really forces Barth to deal with the problem of history is that of the unknown becoming known. When this happens, can Barth's perspective be tenable? Barth must either admit that the "known unknown" can be understood historically, or he must say that the unknown is never really known in a truly historical sense. His theology tends toward the latter. The revelation of Christ as the true man,<sup>3</sup> and what historical man should be and can become in Christ, is in this direction. His interpretation of real history<sup>4</sup> is really a definition of history that is in contrast to human history.

It is not so much that Barth loses sight of the significance of human history as the arena of crisis for man. It is more than in his effort to make the crisis a real one, he destroys it. Barth, who saw man as standing alongside the

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Church Dogmatics, II. 1, pp. 14-17, passim, 20-21.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Christliche Dogmatik, I, p. 264.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 155. See also Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, pp. 132-39, and Barth, Dogmatics, III. 4, pp. 41-45.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Theology and Church, pp. 58ff., 61-64. See also Barth, Dogmatics, III. 4, pp. 574-80.

"mirror of his own consciousness," has brought man into a relationship in which he is so subordinate as to be less responsible in this new perspective as he was in the old.

The consequence is a difficulty in presenting an evangelistic appeal to man based on Barth's interpretation of God's sovereign authority. It can be seen in Barth's sermons when, for example, he preaches on repentance.<sup>1</sup> He defines repentance as "turning about to that which is nearest," which is God. Jesus calls us, says Barth, to believe, but when that is impossible he asks us to simply present ourselves. The vagueness and ambiguity of all this is an inevitable extension of Barth's failure to relinquish to man any real responsibility.

The impossible crisis created in Barth's theology can also be interpreted from another viewpoint as eliminating man's responsibility in such a way as to result in what could be thought of as an almost orthodox concept of universalism. Barth's emphasis upon the limitlessness of faith and God's absolute sovereignty tends toward a doctrine of universal salvation. This would perhaps not cause any great disturbance in theological circles, but it could very well contradict the idea of crisis in his theology. The entire spirit of Barth's theology points in this direction and is especially to be noted in the "christological concentration" of his most recent

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, Come Holy Spirit, trans. by George W. Richards and with an Introduction by Joseph Fort Newton (New York: Round Table Press, 1933), pp. 67-79.

theology. Where, for example, is the genuine crisis in a man's experience who has no control over the decision made when that decision is in reality God's decision.<sup>1</sup> What is theology's real compulsion in the proclamation of the true God? If he is the absolute sovereign of Barth's description, is it really man's responsibility to make him known? This is, of course, overstating the case, but it reflects a problem for which Barth has not offered a solution. It will always be difficult for theology to emphasize man's responsibility if it is not willing to admit a determining role for him to play.

In Barth's theology, God's divine No falls on Christ,<sup>2</sup> and this in itself calls into question where the crisis is in Barth's Christology. Barth gives an almost evangelistic discourse on man's idolatry and his sin of unbelief,<sup>3</sup> but where is the ultimate seriousness of his sin? Where is the urgency for faith? Does Barth reduce man to such a subordinate role as to relieve him of any real responsibility?

This is without question the area of Barth's greatest weakness. It is an inability to show the insertion of man, history, the human in the interpretation and exposition of the divine Word. He attempts this, admirably, and the very attempt

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, God Here and Now, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 220-23.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, pp. 299-303.

shows the difficulty of succeeding on a Barthian basis. The key to the difficulty is Barth's effort to submit his theology to the Word, and, in so doing, he has failed to see the human interaction within the Word itself. Barth's "Word" is an exclusive, isolated one, however much he desires to show that it is not. It is meant to be an all-inclusive Word, which includes man, but Barth guards against the very effort to make the man who is included in Christ a truly responsible creature.

Barth would aspire to present the Word as the all-embracing solution inclusive of the whole of life--"the one Word alongside of which there is and can be no other." It was out of the cry of human need that Barth saw the vision of the Word, and his theology is from the beginning an effort "to tell that God becomes man, but to tell it as the Word of God, as God Himself tells it."<sup>1</sup> Joseph Newton says:

Hence his quest for a Word more authentic, more authoritative, more intimately personal, more inviting, in which the contradictions of human life are reconciled; an answer to the cry of the soul not for truths, but for Truth, not for solutions, but for the Solver, not for something human, but for God as Savior even from humanity.<sup>2</sup>

This glowing tribute to Barth by Newton is an accurate definition of Barthian aims, but it does not question, as must be done, the wisdom of seeking a "Savior even from humanity." One keeps searching for, and Barth keeps denying,

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Come Holy Spirit, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

something of human significance to interact with the divine Word. There are times when Barth seems on the verge of allowing this, only to deny it forcefully. For example, Barth almost presents humility as an obedience which could be the human response to the divine proclamation, but he checks himself with the conclusion that it is God who must make us humble and present us with humility.<sup>1</sup> Barth's insistence upon man's total incapacity keeps him from considering that God could have already presented man with the capacity for humility before the divine revelation.

The key to Barth's unique emphasis, and the key to the problem of its relationship to the natural world, is his insistence that revelation must be transcendent to be real. It must come from outside man and the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> When it does not, the distance between God and man loses "its essential, sharp, acid, and disintegrating ultimate significance."<sup>3</sup> He says:

Once the eye, which can perceive this distinction, has been blinded, there arises in the midst, between here and there, between us and the "Wholly Other," a mist or concoction of religion. . . . In all this mist the prime factor is provided by the illusion that it is possible for men to hold communication with God or, at least, to enter into a covenant relationship with Him without miracle--vertical from above, without the dissolution

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Against the Stream, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 49.



of all concrete things, and apart from THE truth which lies beyond birth and death.<sup>1</sup>

Everything is judged from this premise. It is not only the key to his disinterest in the historical Jesus but the key to his entire Christology. It is the basis of his objection to any Christology which fails to ground itself in the center of revelation--the essence and reality of grace. To do so is to rely on a mere symbol of the act of grace rather than grace itself.<sup>2</sup> This fine line of distinguishing marks the real uniqueness of Barth's basic theological endeavor. He simply will not compromise with anything less than the pure and real revelation of Christ. It is not knowledge about this revelation or knowledge from it that is important. It is the revelation itself, only to be found in Jesus Christ, and only to be known in confrontation with the Word of God.

Barth's christological expression of the "humanity of God" is a consistent, although newly directed, part of this basic theological position. This expression will be examined in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>Barth rejects the Christology of Donald Baillie (God Was in Christ) for this reason. See Godsey, Karl Barth's Table Talk, p. 51.

## CHAPTER III

### THE HUMANITY OF GOD

From the writing of his commentary on Romans onward, Barth is firmly committed to a theology of the revealed Word which proclaims "a God utterly distinct from men."<sup>1</sup> The gospel for him is therefore not a religious message to inform mankind of their hidden divinity or to tell them that they may become divine. It is rather the proclamation that God is "wholly other" than man. The Christology of this early period reflects this emphasis. The true significance of Jesus is not to be found in his humanity but rather in the declaration that he is the Son of God through his resurrection: "In this declaration and appointment--which are beyond historical definition--lies the true significance of Jesus."<sup>2</sup> Within history, "Jesus as the Christ can be understood only as Problem or Myth."<sup>3</sup> His person as the Christ lies beyond historical comprehension.

It is therefore with what may seem a sudden abruptness, especially to those who are not familiar with the Church Dogmatics and the later Barthian emphasis, that one reads a

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

confession from Barth of a change of direction<sup>1</sup> which seeks to derive the knowledge of the humanity of God from the knowledge of his deity. The short essay entitled "The Humanity of God" contains an important summary of recent developments in Barth's theology. It was delivered first as a lecture at a meeting of the Swiss Reformed Minister's Association in 1956, and it summarizes what had already gone into Barth's Dogmatics in a more lengthy and detailed treatment. Barth's remarks in this essay, however much they may seem in contrast to his earlier remarks in Romans, are consistent with the christological sections of the Dogmatics.

It is important to note that Barth does not deny what he has written earlier but reaffirms it before stating the need for a new emphasis. He says of his early insistence upon the deity of God, "Were we right or wrong? We were certainly right!"<sup>2</sup> and, "If that which we then thought we had discovered and brought forth was no last word but one requiring a revision, it was none the less a true word."<sup>3</sup> It is in fact on the basis of what he has already said that Barth inquires into the historical expression of Christology. His early emphasis constitutes the "presupposition" of that which he later says. He says:

He who may not have joined in that earlier change of

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Humanity of God, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

direction, who still may not be impressed with the fact that God is God, would certainly not see what is now to be said in addition as the true word concerning His humanity.<sup>1</sup>

What Barth does confess to is an over-emphasis in one direction, and he likens the result to standing Schleiermacher on his head--"that is, to make God great for a change at the cost of man."<sup>2</sup> He still maintains the cardinal principle of God's sovereignty and says he was wrong at the very place where he was right. He insists on the rightness of a recognition of the deity of God but identifies his failure as not having carried this knowledge through in a relationship to the humanity of God. It was a mistake of viewing the wholly other in isolation. What became necessary was to see that his emphasis upon the sovereign God "found its meaning and its power only in the context of His history and of His dialogue with man, and thus in His togetherness with man."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, says Barth, "It is a matter of God's sovereign togetherness with man, a togetherness grounded in Him and determined, delimited, and ordered through Him alone."<sup>4</sup> In this interpretation, "It is the deity which as such also has the character of humanity."<sup>5</sup>

The christological sections of the Dogmatics are all developed around this new theme that God's deity, when rightly

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

understood, includes his humanity. The Incarnation message of God with us, while it is a statement about God and man, is primarily about God. Barth says, "'God with us' is the center of the Christian message--and always in such a way that it is primarily a statement about God and only then and for that reason a statement about us men."<sup>1</sup> Christian faith must always be understood as faith in and through God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,<sup>2</sup> even while understanding that it involves men. Barth's choice of balance can be seen as he says, "Much depends upon their coming to see that it applies to them. But everything depends upon their coming to see that it all has to do with God; that it is God who is with them as God. For it is this that applies to them."<sup>3</sup> "Emmanuel" is therefore not to be considered a historical figure of the period but the revelation that God does not act without his people but is with them as their God.<sup>4</sup>

#### Change in Barth

S. Paul Schilling<sup>5</sup> correctly recognizes three main periods in Barth's theology, beginning with the decade initiated in 1919 with the publication of Barth's Epistle to the Romans; followed by the period of transition from the late twenties to the appearance in 1931 of Barth's book on Anselm;

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>5</sup>S. Paul Schilling, Contemporary Continental Theologians (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 35-40.

and finally, a further deepening of the transition and the development of the Christocentric nature of his theology marked by the first appearance of the Church Dogmatics in which Barth continues to seek the new direction with each succeeding volume.

Barth's early period is characterized by the dialectical method and reflects the influence of Kierkegaard and the use of paradox.<sup>1</sup> The second period, which began with the appearance of Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, is marked by a movement within the dialectic away from Kierkegaard and paradox and toward an "analogy of faith" which Barth stresses in opposition to the Thomistic "analogy of being." This kind of analogia fidei is really the opposite of the ordinary idea of analogy and differs fundamentally from the Roman Catholic doctrine of the analogie entis.<sup>2</sup> One does not move from self understanding to the knowledge of God, because apart from revelation it is not possible to really know ourselves, let alone God. In the analogy of relation or faith, one can speak truly of God only from a faith relationship to him based on

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<sup>1</sup>Kierkegaard's influence can be seen in the second edition of Romans where by the use of paradox Barth was able to develop a dialectical understanding of the relation between God and man. The use of paradox was Barth's attempt to communicate the "incomprehensible" way of God to man. There were other influences at work in this period as well, including Overbeck and Blumhardt.

<sup>2</sup>For Barth's discussion of this doctrine, see Barth, Dogmatics, II. 1, pp. 75-85, 165, 168, 243 and Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, p. 157.

his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. From this perspective, there is within all the diversity a correspondence between the relation of God to man and the prior relation of God to himself. Within his own nature, God is the interrelatedness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he is related to man as creator and redeemer. The I-Thou relationship within God is thus determinative for the relations between God and man and also between persons. In personal encounter, there exists the divine-human relationships made possible by the analogy of this relationship.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's analogy of faith is not really a genuine analogy, as already noted, or it would call into question either the unity of God or the individuality of man. If human persons are seen in analogy to the Trinity as modes of being within one humanity, as seems Barth's intent, what happens to the concrete singularity of human personality? This problem becomes evident in Barth's christological treatment of man, where individual, singular man is almost lost in the majestic event of Jesus Christ for all men. S. Paul Schilling notes this problem and asks if finite individuals become simply different forms of activity of one human whole<sup>2</sup> as Barth seems to leave them. Barth avoids this dilemma to some degree by changing the meaning of his relational terms when

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 532-33.

<sup>2</sup>Schilling, Contemporary Continental Theologians, pp. 38-39.

he moves from God to man, but then it is really no longer an analogy.

Out of this theological motif there emerges the christological orientation which is the determining influence within the Church Dogmatics. God has revealed himself in the Word made flesh. One only knows God through him. Barth is bound to revelation, and he emphasizes that one only has real revelation when it is the revelation of God. With this emphasis, Barth shows that his purpose in exalting God is not to make him isolated but to make him known. He feels that this is the only way he can reaffirm revelation. Crisis theology thus gives way to positive dogmatics, as Barth came to understand that it was not enough to stress the hiddenness of God or the inability of man to predicate any qualities of him. Rather, one must affirm a genuine revelation of this knowledge in Jesus Christ. The Word of God is synonymous with Jesus Christ. Because the Word of God is the act of God, it is always contemporary.<sup>1</sup>

The only analogy which can be possible is the movement from the revealed knowledge of God, given in faith, to an understanding of man and other created things, but this knowledge is also therefore a revealed knowledge. In the analogy of being,<sup>2</sup> men understand themselves and seek to

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>When Barth rejects the analogy of being, it does



arrive at a proper understanding of the being of God. Barth's theology is to reverse the analogy, so that men can look at God through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ and understand themselves. Man is what he is seen to be in Jesus Christ.

Hans Urs von Balthasar traces the transition in Barth from the period of the dialectic to the analogy and sees its continuing development as one within the dialectic.<sup>1</sup> Hans Kung, another prominent Catholic theologian, asserts that since this development of Barth's thought, he "has never wandered from a radically Christocentric *via media*, avoiding detours both of neo-Protestantism and of Catholicism."<sup>2</sup> Kung defends Barth's methodology by saying:

One thing was clearly established by von Balthasar: Although Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* does not give up the urgent issues of dialectical theology characteristic of his commentary on Romans, he no longer focuses upon "dialectical theology" in the *Dogmatics*. . . . Barth has expressly disassociated Himself from the formula, "God is all, man is nothing." Quite apart from all irrelevance, is it not tiresome to be continually reviving the old complaints and mistrustfully to insist on reading a

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not mean complete disregard for ontology. There is evidence to support the observation made by Gustaf Wingren that while Barth does not admit to being concerned with ontology (and here he reflects a fundamental difference with Paul Tillich), yet ontology has "left its stamp on his whole literary production." Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict*, trans. by Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 23.

<sup>1</sup> von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, pp. 92-123.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Kung, *Justification. The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, trans. by Thomas Collins, Edmund E. Tolk, and David Granskou (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), p. xxv. Hereafter cited as *Justification*.

dialectical formula into Barth even in places where he himself never intended it.<sup>1</sup>

It would, of course, be inaccurate not to note the progression and shift of interest in Barth's theology--revisions which became evident as early as the changes between the first and succeeding editions to his Epistle to the Romans and which culminate in the Church Dogmatics. The crisis of Barth's early theology is never abandoned, however, because, as G. C. Berkouwer points out, the nature of the crisis was not intended to be a "pessimistic attitude to life."<sup>2</sup> What was intended was "a sharply antithetical accentuation of that crisis which is directed against the pride of man who does not know the reality of God and yet thinks to approach him without difficulty or danger."<sup>3</sup> This remains in the background of the new Barth but in an entirely different direction.

Berkouwer argues:

In the Romerbrief as well as in the later self-correction it appears clearly that Barth was least of all concerned to speak a despairing and negative message of crisis. We believe that Barth could later say with good reason that in the one-sidedness of the reaction, which he himself admitted was not without danger, this was not the burden of his speaking.<sup>4</sup>

Berkouwer says Barth was pointing to the crisis for the sake

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>2</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, trans. by Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 29. Hereafter cited as Triumph of Grace.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

of pointing to the grace of God. It was a No for the sake of the Yes which was to follow. He says, "Barth's theology must from its inception be characterized as triumphant theology which aims to testify to the overcoming power of grace."<sup>1</sup> Berkouwer may be pushing a point too far with such a statement in his effort to reveal "the triumph of grace" in Barth's theology. It is hardly true that "we do not find in it a transition from crisis to grace, or from disjunction between God and man to fellowship between them, but rather a relationship between these polarities which Barth was concerned to set forth in varying emphases and accents."<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to know what was in Barth's mind, but a fair judgment from what he has written early and recently makes it difficult to deny that there has been in fact a major and remarkable change from crisis to grace. The crisis makes the grace more triumphant, and they are not necessarily contradictory, but they reflect a fundamental change in Barth's thinking. The only way some of his early theology could make sense in the light of the most recent would be for him to say, "This is what it would be like if there were no reconciliation."

John D. Godsey sees the change in Barth as one which witnesses the dialectic between the creator and the sinful creature change from a dialectic of relationship to a dialectic

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

of movement---"the great movement from God's No to the Yes of God which is spoken to man in Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> This is a helpful comment by Godsey, but again it does not reveal the full dramatic change in Barth's theological concentration. It does point out that the change is a movement within the dialectic rather than away from it, even though the Yes of God that Barth is now declaring is of such a comprehensive and victorious nature as to make the dialectic appear almost non-existent. The dialectic is preserved, however, by Barth's stubborn and consistent preservation of the sovereign nature of God's acts, whether of judgment or grace.<sup>2</sup>

It became increasingly clear throughout the development of Barth's thought that the knowledge of God was bound to revelation as an event initiated by the sovereign Lord. Only God can reveal himself. Even after God reveals himself, and continues to do so in Jesus Christ as the objective revelation of God, the Word continues to preserve the inalienable

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, How I Changed My Mind, with an Introduction by John D. Godsey (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Barth's closing lecture at the University of Basel on March 1, 1962, reflected all the elements that historians will revere and note about his theology: It still included the genius of his original thrust in theology---the sovereign act of God; it revealed the direction that his theology has discovered and followed the past thirty years, and perhaps showed the touch of melancholy and beauty of old age in that it dealt with the subject of love. Barth's lecture before an overflowing audience in the main auditorium of the University of Basel was to magnify "Agape, the perfect love of God which sovereignly seeks the other, the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ!" (Ibid., p. 76.)

subjectivity of God because it is an event of God's presence. All of this Barth sees expressed in such a way as to both declare the revelation of God as the Word made flesh and at the same time the Word maintaining God's inalienable subjectivity in the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Word of God, which is prolegomena to dogmatics proper, could only be an elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity. Prominent in Barth's development is the relationship of the preached Word to the written Word of scripture, both of which point to the primary Word of God that becomes event in Jesus Christ. This entire development in Barth came in company with a continuous struggle with holy scripture<sup>1</sup> and the history of doctrine that called for a continuing interpretation of God's act of revelation which becomes God's act of reconciliation. The foundation of faith is still to be the Word of God, but this Word is a mediating Word--Jesus Christ who is God for man, mystery contained and revealed in the act of reconciliation.

This is why Barth can continue to say, as he did in 1938 (and he says essentially the same thing in his report to Christian Century in 1948 and 1958), that his thinking

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Tillich has noted that Barth's greatness "is that he corrects himself again and again in the light of the 'situation,' . . . and he tries not to be his own follower, but a follower of the witness to holy scripture." Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 5.

remains at one point the same as ever. It is unchanged in this, that not so-called "religion" is its object, its source, and its criterion, but rather, as far as it can be my intention, the Word of God. The Word of God which has established, preserved, and sustained the Christian church, her theology, her preaching, and her mission. The Word of God which in the Holy Scriptures speaks to man--to the men of all times, countries, circumstances, and stages of life. The Word of God which is the mystery of God in His relation to man and not, as the term "religion" seems to imply, the mystery of man in his relationship to God.<sup>1</sup>

Barth declares his purpose as being to bring into a clearer perspective the theology he began with, but he recognizes in 1938 that the positive factor in his development is a "christological concentration,"<sup>2</sup> in which he gives special attention to Calvin and the reformers. Barth discovers a new freedom and clarity in this context. He says, "Christian doctrine, if it is to merit its name and if it is to build up the Christian church in the world . . . , has to be exclusively and conclusively the doctrine of Jesus Christ--of Jesus Christ as the living Word of God spoken to us men."<sup>3</sup>

#### The Sin of Man

An important consequence to the change of direction in Barth's theology is the light in which man's sin and estrangement is to be understood. Robert McAfee Brown points

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 37. See also Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. See also Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 45.

out that one of the persistent misunderstandings of Barth is to accuse him of being so caught up in the Pauline analysis of sin and judgment and crisis that all he can do is preach doom and catastrophe and human impotence---"since man can do nothing, all must be left to God."<sup>1</sup> A more recent understanding of Barth, says Brown, is to note that he

has also stressed the fact that we can only know about sin because we already know about grace; it is only because we know that the power of sin has already been conquered by the power of God that we know how ominous is the adversary for whom we have already been delivered.<sup>2</sup>

All of this is a part of the new and total inclusiveness of Barth's Christology. It begins to unfold with the first volume of the Dogmatics and is made clear with regard to the doctrine of man in Volume III, where Barth shows that the understanding of man and the discovery of his true meaning come only through faith in Christ, the new Adam.

From this point forward, Barth departs from the traditional order of systematic theology as to the "history of salvation" (creation, sin, and reconciliation). In Barth's Christology, reconciliation in each of its phases precedes the discussion of the corresponding phase of the doctrine of sin. He carefully works out a correlation between the person of Christ (as the one who humbles himself, is exalted, and

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<sup>1</sup>Georges Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, trans. with an Introduction by Robert McAfee Brown (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. xv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

who witnesses to our reconciliation) and his work. This means that the nature of sin is discovered only afterward, as it is revealed and uncovered in the light of Christ. This is not only one of the most unusual but perhaps one of the most controversial of Barth's innovations in theology. According to his christological interpretation of man and sin, men only understand their sin as those who are in reality already pardoned and their damnation only as the abyss from which the saviour Christ has already removed them. This says in effect that there is no knowledge preliminary to, or separate from, Christ. The world, history, and mankind (including his sin) is understood only as they are illumined by the person and work of Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is revealed knowledge. Barth says, "In the knowledge of sin we have to do basically and in general with a specific variation of the knowledge of God, of God as He has mediated Himself to man, and therefore of the knowledge of revelation and faith."<sup>2</sup>

The knowledge to man that he is a sinner is lacking because he is a sinner.<sup>3</sup> Sin must itself be revealed and it is done so at the cost to God of reconciliation in Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>The implications of this methodology are meant to be far-reaching and they are. Georges Casalis says that Barth's intent is that those who follow after him will discover in the event and work of Christ such an inclusive victory that it will be applied to every area of the life of the church. Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 359.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 361.



Christ. God does this for man and in his place, and "He has done all this alone."<sup>1</sup> Reconciliation will not allow for itself to rest in any way on man's ability to "co-operate with, and contribute to, that which Jesus Christ does for him. . . . He can only believe that all that took place there took place for him."<sup>2</sup> Man's sin, according to Barth, must be viewed from this Christocentric basis. He says,

nor is it enough merely to reflect on the incapacity and impotence of man. This will inevitably give rise to some form of determinism, which in turn will give new life and force to the counter-arguments of indeterminism.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, one cannot have even the negative knowledge of his sins except in positive faith, and this faith can only come from Christ. The sin of man is his pride, which is also his disobedience and his unbelief. Man's sin offends the majesty of God,<sup>4</sup> and it is revealed in his confrontation with Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> It is christologically determined.

Because of his new emphasis upon the union of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ, Barth now holds a much more affirmative view of man than in his early theology. Man is created by God to be his covenant-partner. To be a man means primarily to be chosen, summoned, awakened, and claimed by the Word of God. In creating man, God chose the good and gave it being; to be truly human, therefore, is to affirm gladly what

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 412.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

God has chosen as good. When man sins he actualizes that which has no being, because it is the possibility which God did not choose to create. In this sense, sin is an "ontological impossibility," while the doing of God's will is man's only way of realizing his ontological possibility. Sin is a mode of being that is actually contrary to his humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Man does sin, however, and when he does he lives in contradiction between his original determination for God and his own rebellious determination against God. By opposing the divine he actualizes "nothingness," loses his true identity and introduces chaos into creation.<sup>2</sup> Man even in sin is not outside the grace of God. He is elected to righteousness. Even when in bondage to sin, his real nature is maintained by God, whom he cannot make a "manless" God. He hears the No of God's judgment, but it is still God's eternal Yes. This swing from a one-sided emphasis upon man's separation from God to his participation in the union and victory of Jesus Christ has brought to the forefront the problem of evil in the recent theology of Barth. Brown says of Barth's optimism that he is "so sure of the conquering power of the grace of God that he actually has a hard time finding a place for evil in his

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 494-97. See also Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, pp. 136, 142, 146, 273-75.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, pp. 136, 274ff, and Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 448-78, passim.

theology,"<sup>1</sup> and acknowledges that evil is an "ontological impossibility" with Barth.<sup>2</sup>

This fact becomes the basis of a searching criticism of Barth's theology by the Lutheran scholar, Gustaf Wingren. He says:

There is in Barth's theology no active power of sin, no tyrannical, demonic power that subjects man to slavery and which God destroys in his work of redemption. There is no devil in Barth's theology. This is a constant feature in his theological production.<sup>3</sup>

The result, according to Wingren, is that Barth--having denied the objective existence of evil--presents a conflict between God and man in which there is no evil power and God, therefore, "bestows, not demands, righteousness."<sup>4</sup> Wingren draws the following distinction between Barth and Luther:

The main question with Luther is the question of righteousness. But with Barth the main question is whether we have knowledge of God, or whether in ourselves we lack such knowledge and must receive it from the outside. These are two entirely different questions. Luther holds that natural law compels us to do works; there is no encroachment on the gospel which deals with an entirely different righteousness. The gospel retains its unique position. Barth cannot bear to hear about a natural law, because in

<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xl. To observe that Barth finds it difficult to find a place for evil in his theology may also be to admit to the difficulty of finding a place for real man. Man as viewed in his historical existence is well acquainted with evil. The fact that sin is an "ontological impossibility" means that unbelief is also ontologically impossible and tends to leave man irresponsible. See Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 533. See also Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup>Wingren, Theology in Conflict, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

that case the will of God would be known independently of the incarnation, and the revelation in Christ would only compliment something natural, i.e., something human. The positions of Barth and Luther are incompatible and cannot at all be reconciled. It is remarkable that Barth, who otherwise possesses keen insight, cannot see this, but rather continually imagines that he preserves the intentions of Luther.<sup>1</sup>

Wingren misses the fact that in Barth's view of revelation there is to be discovered not only knowledge, but in Christ a completely new and victorious life. So much so that Wingren's statement, "That which disappears from our attention through the theological work of Barth in this generation is the living and active God of the Bible, this God who continually creates and gives,"<sup>2</sup> seems extreme to those who are familiar with the richness and totality of the christological content of Barth's theology. Wingren admits that "Barth speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus," but he says that the Incarnation remains the chief event and "nothing that Barth says in this connection invalidates his general principle that evil has no objective existence. This frame in which the enemy is missing surrounds everything in Barth's theology."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43. Wingren's interest in the "evil power within man" dominates his judgment of Barth and leads him to make the unwarranted criticism that "Barth has the ability to a very large degree of being able to employ the language of scripture in a system that is totally foreign to the Bible." Ibid., p. 125. Such an opinion is clearly biased.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

It is difficult to deny that evil is a much greater hindrance and problem than Barth's christological analysis allows or possibly can allow. Moreover, if theology is to do justice to all dimensions of reality, then Barth will need to interpret evil with a more real status. Even so, it is doubtful that Wingren will find much support for his criticism that Barth "has not penetrated beneath the liberal period in order to find in more profound eras the real help that he needs for the difficult task of interpreting scripture."<sup>1</sup> It is true that "there was no evil power in the liberal theology against which Barth continually reacts," but such an admission would deny the depth of Barth's study and use not only of the church fathers (including Anselm and Thomas) but the reformers as well the influence of whom are constantly visible throughout the Dogmatics. There is also evidence, unappreciated by Wingren, of the growing independence of Barth's theology from that of a reaction. The reactionary period in Barth is limited to his early theology, so that most of the theology of the Church Dogmatics is that of a pilgrim in search of truth and reflects a freedom almost unparalleled in theological history. The problem of evil in Barth's theology has in fact grown out of that freedom. The remarkable nature of Barth's theology is that it is as free from the reformed tradition that it endeavors to appreciate as it is the liberal challenge

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

that it seeks to overcome.

While there is much to appreciate in Professor Wingren's criticism, and indeed Barth has left a serious void in his theological system with regard to the place and objective existence of sin and evil, one would be asking too much of Barth to simply satisfy the need for such an emphasis at the expense of the freedom which is so valuable a contribution of his theology. Wingren's criticism that "there is always something temporary and relative in Barth's constructions"<sup>1</sup> is really one of the chief strengths of Barth's theology.

Wingren's conclusion seems to be that because the problem of man is a matter of guilt and righteousness, "it is irrelevant to come with a word of revelation in which God's superiority over man is something essential."<sup>2</sup> To make such a judgment would be to deny the fact that the Word which Barth brings to bear upon the human situation is a Word which includes not only guilt and righteousness but man's judgment, forgiveness, sanctification, and hope. The Word in Barth's theology is an inclusive one and does not deny the least of man's fundamental needs, nor does it fail to carry with it the completeness of man's fulfillment. Wingren does touch upon a needful area of criticism when he speaks of the revelation in Barth's theology being one of "God's superiority

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

over man" and failing to mediate deeply enough into man's humanity,<sup>1</sup> but he is wrong in asserting that in Barth, "no contact is made with what is central in the Bible and in the Reformation."<sup>2</sup>

### The Grace of God

The consistent feature in Barth's theology, old and new, is his attachment to the object of God's revelation. The revealed God of the Word in Barth's new emphasis becomes "God for man." Once described by Barth as "wholly-other," God is shown as having come into man's history to redeem him. Barth's first problem was to rescue theology from the danger of complete secularization and of being emptied of God's reality. His new problem is to relate this reality to man and his history and to keep his theology from seeing only the transcendent. The key to Barth's new direction as he attempts this solution is a deeper understanding of Christology and its implications. The emphasis within his Christology, however, will continue to be that of divine initiative and sovereignty. Barth's premise is that modern man's acute awareness of his own misery does not make him look for a God who suffers with him as much as for a sense of divine reality that will dissolve his fear of the abyss between himself and God. This is the attempt of Barth's Christology.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

Because Barth develops a doctrine of reconciliation that maintains the sovereignty of God, he is correct in saying that what he is saying is not a "new Barth"<sup>1</sup> as some have regarded him. He undoubtedly feels that he has given sufficient treatment to man's place in the event of reconciliation, however, to correct any alleged weakness in this area. He has developed a new direction of thought, but consistent with his original and fundamental promise. It is not a change from the only Object he considers proper for theology but simply an effort to direct that Object, as he finds this direction in the Word, toward man as the person to whom the revelation is addressed. What was once the "omnipotence of His power" has become the "omnipotence of His mercy," but he is still the sovereign Lord. The atonement is an act of divine sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> It is an act of God's grace<sup>3</sup> and was made necessary by the separation between man and God as already developed in Barth's theology:

On the one side there is God in His glory as Creator and Lord, and also in the majesty of His holiness and righteousness. And on the other side there is man, not merely the creature, but the sinner, the one who exists in the

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<sup>1</sup>See Emil Brunner, "The New Barth," Scottish Journal of Theology, IV. 2 (1951), pp. 123ff. Barth says in introducing his new direction: "Perspicacious readers will surely notice that there is no break with the basic view which I have adopted since my parting with liberalism, but only a more consistent turn in its developments." Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. x.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 80.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 81.



flesh and who in the flesh is in opposition to Him. It is not merely a frontier, but a yawning abyss. Yet this abyss is crossed, not by man, not by both God and man, but only by God.<sup>1</sup>

The distance between God and man is great because God is as he is and man by his sins is unable to approach him. Barth's view of the breach that divides the two, as defined above, is no doubt a major factor in the construction of his Christology. It is only the act of God, as God, that is adequate for man's redemption. Barth says:

What takes place in this work of inconceivable mercy is, therefore the free over-ruling of God, but it is not an arbitrary overlooking and ignoring, not an artificial bridging, covering-over or hiding, but a real closing of the breach, gulf and abyss between God and us for which we are responsible.<sup>2</sup>

And, he says:

So, then, man can have "peace with God" (Rom. 5.1). But how and on what basis? We can only answer: by the Word of God, in Jesus Christ, by faith in Him, by the Holy Spirit who awakens faith. But all that (and especially the naming of the name Jesus Christ) . . . the taking place of the atonement willed and accomplished by Him.<sup>3</sup>

Robert McAfee Brown's defense against the criticism that Barth's early emphasis upon transcendence and the otherness of God is one-sided is to say that "this emphasis was only a needed corrective at the moment, which has had its own corrective long since in Barth's writings."<sup>4</sup> Brown is probably justified in saying that Barth has corrected the one-sided

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 82.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>4</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xvii.

stress of the transcendence or otherness of God. If we interpret the "transcendence" of God to mean that God is "in heaven" then Brown is certainly correct. Barth clearly develops, as Brown points out, the idea that "the deity of God is thus expressed precisely in the humanity of a God who is not 'other' and aloof, but who has come incredibly near"<sup>1</sup> in the person of Jesus Christ. There is a danger, however, of misinterpreting Barth at this point in an effort to defend him against the charge of transcendence.<sup>2</sup> The humanity Barth is now concerned to emphasize is not to be equated with historical humanity. It is historical, but it is not the same as man's history.

It is true that Barth's treatment of Christology throughout the discussion in Volume IV gives emphasis to the coming of God into the world of man, but this is not a denial of either the transcendence or the otherness of God. It is in fact a reaffirmation of these qualities now shown to be in favor of man rather than in opposition to him. The problem in Barth's Christology may still be a one-sided emphasis upon God's deity. This is the key question with regard to Barth's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Brown is in danger of misinterpreting Barth when he likens the humanity of Christ in Barth's theology to the "humanity" of the biblical text. Brown says that Barth glories in the fact that "God speaks through the pages of a fallible text, so that the text will not be an end in itself, but a witness beyond itself to Jesus Christ, who, like the text, comes to us in full humanity." Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii. The "full humanity" of Christ as described by Barth is simply not analogous to the errors and fallibility of Scripture.

doctrine of the Incarnation. In Barth, the humanity of God is still deity. It is still "other" even when it comes "incredibly near."

Barth succeeds in not completely refuting his early theology by stressing the fact that we only know about sin because we already know about grace; it is only because we know the power of sin has already been broken that we know how terrible is the condition from which we have already been delivered. However, in fairness to what Barth has written in the early stages of his theology (to which he admits to dangerous extremes),<sup>1</sup> it is precisely this knowledge--knowledge of the verdict and victory of grace--which was missing from his early interpretation and allowed it to lead to such an impossible crisis. The responsibility for the lack of accuracy and relevance between Barth's early critics and his later theology (a fact often cited by Barth's defenders) must be shared by Barth and his "change of direction." It should also be noted that the change in Barth has not been a total one, so that much of the early criticism toward his theology has still to be answered satisfactorily. The characteristic problem of Barth's view of man's relationship to God is still present.

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<sup>1</sup>Barth has admitted to the falseness of the antithesis he stressed in Romans when he emphasized the "chasm which separates God and man" as part of the "eternal qualitative distinction between time and eternity." Barth, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 31, 99. Against this, Barth now emphasizes the incarnation wherein God becomes temporal without ceasing to be eternal. Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 186-88. The idea of God as "wholly other" is now to Barth "untenable, and corrupt and pagan." See Barth, Humanity of God, pp. 42-46.

Some of Barth's defenders would take a position that Barth himself has not taken in an effort to ward off such criticism.

It is no small feat that Barth has been able to shift his emphasis from God to man in such a way as to give an answer to the almost intolerable crisis observed in the second chapter of the thesis and yet maintain a consistent argument with his earlier views of man and the sovereignty of God. While Barth's success in this direction is to be admired, when the situation between man and God as described in his recent theology is read alongside that of his early theology, they are conflicting. Barth wants to say that his change of direction is a shift of interest that does not deny the crisis of his early theology but finds it resolved in God's work in Christ. The problem for Barth's theology and those who interpret it becomes a matter of relating what he has already said to what he is saying now in his Christology. That he is saying something different must be admitted, even while acknowledging the consistency of his fundamental premise.

Man in general is to be seen in a completely new light than the early Barthian interpretation of him. The man described by Barth in his early theology is the same man now described as reconciled in Christ, but they are remarkably different. Barth's plea that his theology be read as a whole is meant to bring coherence into what would otherwise be conflicting interpretations, but the extremes of his theology are not

brought together by Barth himself in any kind of synthesis. He seems almost to ignore at times what he has stated earlier concerning man, but he never refutes it. After having written concerning man's estrangement from God, Barth leaves the impression of saying, "Now, I have said that, and it is true. But now, I want to say something different, and it is also true." He then leaves the interpreter of his theology to find a proper relationship between the two contrasting emphases and to attempt to fuse them into a single statement about God and man.

Barth has described a crisis in his early theology that is in contrast to the new relationship of the reconciled man. They cannot both continue in man's relationship to God, but one must give way to the other. If one is to regard the work of Christ's reconciliation as overcoming the crisis, he would almost have to ask Barth where the knowledge of that work was when he wrote his der Romerbrief and much of his original theology. That theology seems almost to have been written before Barth had any concept of man's justification. While he has admitted to an over-emphasis in this early work, Barth has maintained the substance of what he has said concerning man's position apart from God's work of reconciliation. Is he saying that this crisis by estrangement is what would be if there were no reconciliation, or is there a real condition in man that continues until the work of reconciliation becomes an

actuality to him? If this is so, then one would expect a word from Barth as to man's response that would make his reconciliation, accomplished in Christ, an actuality.

The question is that of the justification of man.

Barth's statement in this regard is:

The right of God established in the death of Jesus Christ, and proclaimed in His resurrection in defiance of the wrong of man, is as such the basis of the new and corresponding right of man. Promised to man in Jesus Christ, hidden in Him and only to be revealed in Him, it cannot be attained by any thought or effort or achievement on the part of man. But the reality of it calls for faith in every man as a suitable acknowledgment and appropriation and application.<sup>1</sup>

If Barth means by the "reality of it" for justification to become actual for man, then the necessary response indicated by Barth is faith on the part of man. If, on the other hand, he means simply the realization of the fact that he is already justified in Christ, then the crisis is already dissolved for man in Christ even before his faith makes it a reality. The responsibility of theology then becomes a matter of making men aware of what has already been accomplished for them in Christ. This seems to be what Barth is saying. In the same judgment in which man is accused, he is forgiven,<sup>2</sup> so when man is correctly aware of the crisis in his confrontation with God, he is in that moment justified. Barth does not admit to this difference, but in his early theology man remained in crisis,

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 514.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 516.

even after his justification;<sup>1</sup> in his most recent view, man's crisis is transferred from himself to Christ, so that he is no longer in a state of judgment and condemnation. This is an important innovation made necessary if reconciliation is to be genuine.

Barth's development of the Incarnation as God who humbled himself to accomplish man's reconciliation is begun in part one of Volume IV, and he anticipates the problem of the Christian man versus the non-Christian that he later develops in part two under the section, "The Direction of the Son." He insists that all of human life is brought into the exaltation of Christ, but it is not the human existence that was and is in opposition to God. It is an exalted and reconciled human existence. This, according to Barth, is the real man and real human existence. He says, "Primarily and finally we ourselves are what we are in Him."<sup>2</sup> Barth does not consider sufficiently the problem of how theology is to address the man who is not so exalted and reconciled. He seems to indicate that such men no longer exist, that all men are reconciled to

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 150-51.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 270. It is interesting to note that Barth's recent interpretation of the ontological connection between sinful man and Jesus is in sharp contrast to his earlier attack upon liberal theology for a somewhat similar relationship between God and man. The difference for Barth is its christological center, where the possibility for such a relationship is determined completely by God's action in Jesus. The resulting identity, however, is much the same as that once criticized by Barth.

God in Christ, even when not aware of it. If so, what is to be the responsibility of theology to such men--to secular man? If the real problem of human existence is one of recognition and realization, then the key is as Bonhoeffer has indicated--a new and effective vehicle of interpretation.<sup>1</sup> This is simply to understand the difference between Christian and non-Christian existence, between the religious and the "non-religious" world. It is to recognize theology's responsibility to the secular.

Barth recognizes that there is a difference between Christian and non-Christian man. The difference is not, however, that the non-Christian lacks the ontological relationship to Jesus. He does not. All men find their existence revealed and determined by him. The difference between them is that Jesus Christ is present in the person and activity of the Christian. Barth says:

In the act of Christian hope man lives not merely in the factuality of the decision made by God concerning his whole being, but also in the factuality of his own corresponding thoughts and words and works in relation to the service of God.<sup>2</sup>

It is Christian man whose being is grounded in that of Jesus Christ,<sup>3</sup> but the sensational sweep of Barth's

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, pp. 91-94, 108-10.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Doctrines, IV. 1, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Doctrines, IV. 2, pp. 280ff.



Christology does not stop until it includes all men. He says:

Even sinful man is seen together with the man Jesus, which means that in the man Jesus even sinful man is confronted by the One in whom the divine decision has been made concerning him, in whom there is already resolved and accomplished his deliverance from sin, his elevation, his restoration as a true covenant-partner of God. In other words there is no Jesus existing exclusively for Himself, and there is no sinful man who is not affected and determined with and by His existence.<sup>1</sup>

Christian proclamation, according to Barth, cannot possibly escape seeing the two together, and he regards this fact as both magnifying even more the divine decision made concerning sinful man in Jesus, "and therefore the ontological connection between the two."<sup>2</sup> As to the consideration of the unique responsibility of theology to the secular, Barth would consider any attempt to see either man or Jesus apart from this ontological connection as "wandering off into abstractions."<sup>3</sup>

With this limitation, how can there ever be any real antithesis between sinful man and Jesus? If one is not able to inquire and view the existence of man at some point apart from Jesus, what is their relationship outside the circle of faith? Barth's position is unmistakable, however, and he states that "the Church's proclamation everywhere suffers to some extent from

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 281. It is helpful to note the implication when Barth ties the doctrine of creation to that of the covenant, so that "creation is the road to the covenant." Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III: The Doctrine of Creation, Part 1, trans. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the fact that it does not speak of this connection with sufficient emphasis."<sup>1</sup>

The atonement is not to be grounded in man, but his new creation in the atonement is one which gives man himself a new grounding from above. Barth says, "This creating and grounding of a human subject which is new in relation to God and therefore in itself is, in fact, the event of the atonement made in Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> This means we cannot get behind this reconciled man in a search for knowledge, because, "Whatever we have to think and say of man, and not only of the Christian but of man in general, at every point we have to think and say it of his being as man reconciled in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> Man to Barth is therefore man as he is seen and interpreted in Jesus Christ. This leaves again the problem of secular man and forces the question, Is this really man, and how is he related to society? Barth sees even man in general in christological terms--as "concrete reality," "individuality," and "power," but this is hardly a description that fits the humanity to be observed in the secular world. To say that "we cannot speak of the being of man except from the standpoint of the Christian and in the light of the particular being of man in Jesus Christ"<sup>4</sup> may be to say that we cannot

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.      <sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

speak of secular man. Man to whom the gospel is addressed is not in Jesus Christ in any observable fashion. He can only be seen as such in the christological framework of Barth's reference, and men do not see each other or themselves from this standpoint.

Barth faces a tremendous challenge not only in endeavoring to cause men to think of themselves from this christological center but to think of the world around them from this center and to interpret their existence on a christological basis. It must be acknowledged that Barth's interpretation of man is a "statement of faith,"<sup>1</sup> and it leaves unresolved the problem that there are men in the world who are not men of faith. There is a secular world that does not think in christological terms. Barth tends to ignore this world even while developing a Christology that is meant to include it.

Barth makes it clear that this is an accomplished work, requiring nothing from man. It is something which Jesus Christ has accomplished for us, the perfection of his sacrifice which cannot be added to by anyone or anything.<sup>2</sup> Jesus Christ is the "whole power of our conversion."<sup>3</sup> Barth's new interpretation is in marked contrast to the crisis described throughout his early theology.<sup>4</sup> How is one to shift from one emphasis to

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 281.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 557.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 583.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 150, 170ff.

the other without the abruptness of Barth's treatment? If one understands that the crisis is resolved in Christ, then how is it to be observed and what is man's response and participation? Barth seems to say that the anthropological place in the atonement is simply to provide the human sphere for the divine act to take place. What man's response to the divine act within the human sphere is to be is still suspect in Barth's development. His discussion of human response is only to admit to a corresponding human activity conditioned by the divine act. "We need not be fanatically anti-mystical," he says,

as one element in the activity which puts the love to God into effect, there may be a place for a feeling of enjoyable contemplation of God. But it cannot take the place of that activity.<sup>1</sup>

Brown's defense of Barth that "If Barth is someday adjudged a great heretic, it will not be for his pessimism, but for his optimism!"<sup>2</sup> is really no defense. Better not to be adjudged a heretic at all! The central theme around which Barth swings in his development of the views of judgment and grace is still the key issue. It is an emphasis upon divine sovereignty that, whether it stresses judgment or grace, sin or salvation, pessimism or optimism, is still overbearing with regard to man's participation. If this emphasis is shown

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Doctrines, IV. 1, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xvi.

to be a meaningful encounter between God and man while maintaining the sovereign initiative of God, it must also allow for the free human response of man lest he be reduced to an absolute abstraction. It must identify the humanity of the Incarnation so as to reach where man really is. One can appreciate the joyful emphasis upon the victory of Christ in man's behalf but at the same time observe that Barth does not cross through man's real world to get to this new place in his theology. It is almost an antithesis to his early emphasis, and yet both revolve around man's impotent position, and the drama and event remain so much God's doing that man---although described by Barth as both participant and recipient---is not responsibly involved.

Gerhard Ebeling's concept of "the nature of faith" centers in the fact that Christian faith assumes "a definite kind of participation."<sup>1</sup> Theology in recent years has awakened to the importance of demonstrating this aspect of man's relationship to God. Barth's own theology in the past decade has been the result of his genuine effort to keep man from being merely the "object" of God's sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> He must answer the question, What is man's response to God's act? How does man participate in the event that brings him

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 4.

to God and changes him from "non-Christian" to "Christian?" This question is vital to any theology which intends to address itself to humanity.

The Doctrine of Reconciliation, as contained in all three parts of Volume IV of the Church Dogmatics, is Barth's answer to the question of man's significance in theology. He believes that he has answered the criticism of his theology from this direction when he calls attention in part two that he has dealt at length with the participation of man in the event of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> While saying this, however, Barth warns that he is unable to leave the sphere of God's grace in order to turn to another,<sup>2</sup> a fact which undoubtedly limits his success. He attempts to give man a place of participation by giving him a place of significance, saying of man: "In his own particular, subordinate and secondary place and manner and function he is also a subject of this whole occurrence."<sup>3</sup> Barth's answer to the question of how it is possible and actual that a man becomes and is a Christian is to say:

If we are to think and speak in New Testament terms the answer can only be that, deriving from Jesus Christ, i.e., His resurrection, there is a sovereignly operative power of revelation, and therefore of the transition from Him to us, of His communication with us; a power by whose working there is revealed and made known to us our own election as it has taken place in Him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 318.

Barth cannot admit anything else. To do so would lead in his view to a theology where man would be "reconciling himself with himself."<sup>1</sup> He chooses, therefore, to deal with the question of man's participation under the "Exaltation of the Son of Man" and interpret the anthropological implications from this Christocentric center. This position causes Barth to say, "The fact that the man Jesus is the whole basis and power and guarantee of our exaltation means that there can be no place for any other in this function."<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty Barth encounters is that of maintaining both man's free and responsible decision and at the same time God's sovereign action. Herbert Hartwell says Barth leans too far in preserving God's sovereignty: "In his legitimate endeavor to make quite clear that in the relationship between God and man God works everything and man can add nothing to it, Barth goes too far in denying any co-operation on man's part."<sup>3</sup> The result is an inconsistency, as observed by Hartwell:

If for instance, the subjective revelation and the subjective reconciliation require for their completion man's

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. ix-x. See also Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 84-88, where Barth insists that the atonement be clearly stated as the "sovereign act of God" and God remain the "free subject of the atonement" lest the grace cease to be his grace.

<sup>3</sup>Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 186.

acknowledgment and acceptance and if the latter are man's own free and responsible decision and action, then man does at least to this extent participate, even though this may be a result of God's grace in him. To deny this is to deny man's free and responsible decision and action.<sup>1</sup>

Barth allows a greater degree of participation and subjective awareness with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit than in any other context. He has repeatedly indicated that this is the only safe direction that theology can move with regard to the question of man's participation.<sup>2</sup> He says, "The power whose operation is presupposed in the New Testament is the outgoing and receiving and presence and action of the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> He awakens us to our election, to see ourselves in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, in fact, makes us Christians.

Barth leaves unsatisfied the question of why some hear the Word of God and believe and others do not. To say that man's faith is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit in man is to make this question even more pressing. Does God give faith to some but not to others? This would contradict Barth's own premise of the universal scope of reconciliation, as well as the truth that God loves all men equally. Barth's recurring discussion of the vital relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of reconciliation never really clarifies the issue. If men are already objectively

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 320-30, passim.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 319.



reconciled as Barth says they are, then why is the subjective reconciliation needed to "complete" the work of reconciliation? If, on the other hand, this subjective reconciliation is necessary for the completion of the work of reconciliation, what is the meaning of the objective completeness of the work of reconciliation, and in particular with regard to those who refuse to acknowledge and accept their reconciliation with God?

Barth's seeming answer is that in distinguishing the two aspects of reconciliation, he means only to emphasize the twofold truth that the work of reconciliation has been accomplished by Jesus Christ to the extent that man cannot and need not add to it but merely receive it with thanksgiving and thus come to the subjective realization of its merit and power. In any case the subjective aspect seems to qualify at least to some degree the objective completeness of reconciliation, and for this reason it too is worked by God in man by the Holy Spirit.

### Christological Concentration

The outstanding characteristic of Barth's theology as visible throughout the Dogmatics is its "christological concentration," or the "Triumph of Grace" as shown by G. C. Berkouwer, or--as Barth prefers--the theme borrowed from Blumhardt, "Jesus is Victor." George Casalis says, "The one thing that makes Barth's theology most distinctive and

revolutionary is the centrality given to the doctrine of Christ, not only in Volume IV, but in all the preceding volumes."<sup>1</sup> Barth himself says:

A church dogmatics must . . . be Christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts, as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the church, is its one and only criterion, and as surely as this revealed Word is identical with Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Barth came to see that he must speak with a christological concentration, acknowledging that "one cannot subsequently speak christologically, if Christology has not already been presupposed at the outset."<sup>3</sup> This conviction that Christology is the key to a proper theological method, which began with Barth's study of Anselm, brings Barth from the dialectical mixture of judgment and grace to the complete "Triumph of Grace."<sup>4</sup> Robert McAfee Brown says of this method:

If one is to isolate a single thing that Barth has done irrevocably to theology, it must surely be this rigorous insistence that Christ does not enter at the end of the human quest to add a final blessing to it, but he must be present at the very beginning to determine the direction and content of all that follows.<sup>5</sup>

This is the theme of the Dogmatics and the consequence of

<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Berkouwer points out that "the triumph of grace" in Barth's theology is not an abstract optimism. It bears "a concrete name: Jesus Christ." Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xxvii.

this concentration, in contrast to the fearful uncertainty that was undeniably a part of Barth's early theology, is a God-accomplished "nevertheless"<sup>1</sup> which proceeds to joyful certainty.<sup>2</sup>

The Christocentric period of Barth's theology is simultaneous with the writing of the Church Dogmatics and it reaches its full expression in Volume IV, The Doctrine of Reconciliation. In Jesus Christ the eternal Word is actualized in a human-divine life in earthly history, thus becoming the Word of reconciliation addressed to man by God. In an act of free and sovereign love, the whole of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes the estate of man as his own cause. The broken relation is restored. Man's salvation is possible because God has become what man is, and man is what God has become in Jesus Christ. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, historical events, God identifies himself with man's sin, is judged in man's place, transforms man's condition from within history (and thus becomes the inner-hidden meaning of history), and conquers sin and death. This opens the way to man's reconciliation which is effected within the faithful community created and empowered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> Thus is fulfilled the covenant based on God's

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, II. 2, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-65, passim.

<sup>3</sup>The "faithful community" is the church which is

eternal election of man, whereby God graciously determines himself to be man's God and man to be God's man.<sup>1</sup>

The three parts of Volume IV include a full treatment of Christology: The theme is Christ, who in part one is shown as the revelation of God as a servant to accomplish man's reconciliation; in part two as the royal man in whom man is exalted and brought into fellowship with God; in part three as the God-man who is the guarantor of the atonement. All these themes are but different aspects of the same event-- Christ is exalted as he is debased and is lifted up as he is brought low. The result is an attempt toward an "orthodox" Christology in the Calvinistic tradition. It is given new significance by the integration of Christology and soteriology and the comprehensive scope given it by Barth.

From this christological center, Barth continues his rejection of natural theology. Barth's "christological concentration" can in fact rightly be considered an antithesis to natural theology. It is the uncompromising dogma that Christian thinking must begin and end with Christ and not

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christologically centered and determined and only thus genuine. The Holy Spirit is Christocentric as "the power in which Jesus Christ attests Himself." See Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 643ff.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 648. See also Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 3-4, 298, 312.

elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ is the sole discloser of God.<sup>2</sup> Natural theology can yield only abstract conclusions concerning God's existence as supreme Ruler and man's general response to him. It cannot discover the real God who acts and reconciles in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit for man's salvation and who is related to man through a personal covenant of grace.<sup>3</sup> There may be other realities and forces, such as philosophy, history, and ethics, which are worthy of consideration and respect from the Christian community, but these represent not revealed knowledge of God but human conceptions subject to correction and revocation. Therefore, the church cannot derive from them any part of its proclamation or include them in its one witness.<sup>4</sup>

The church's existence is identical to Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> Otto Weber calls this Barth's "leading thesis."<sup>6</sup> Because this is true, we must look to Christ for everything--for the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert W. Jenson has followed Barth's thesis in this regard and has written a fairly good analysis of Barth's "christological concentration." Robert W. Jenson, Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963). Hereafter cited as Alpha and Omega.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 99-104.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-20. <sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 837, 849-53, passim.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, pp. 33-34, 43-45.

<sup>6</sup>Otto Weber, Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, trans. by Arthur C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 23.

language of faith, for its content, in other words, totally. The christological concentration by Barth, which Berkouwer defends as "not in conflict with the earlier phase of his teaching,"<sup>1</sup> is given by him the following definitive tribute:

On the basis of all the foregoing we feel warranted in characterizing Barth's theology as a form of theological thinking in which, in ever broadening reflection and in consciously Christological concentrations, the triumph of grace stands central. Barth wants to stimulate the preaching of the gospel in the somberness of a catastrophic and depressing period of human history and to infuse new life into the witness to Jesus Christ as Victor. He wishes to do this in sharp antithesis to every kind of triumph that can be found in man or in the world.<sup>2</sup>

This absolute christological interpretation of theology whereby Jesus Christ is victor, as ably described by Berkouwer, is in sharp contrast to any other leading theological expression.<sup>3</sup> Jesus Christ is made the point of departure of every theological proposition and is the key to an understanding of God, the universe, and man.<sup>4</sup> It is unequalled in the comprehensive scope of its content. It is this quality that leads Robert McAfee Brown to ask, "Does this not take one

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<sup>1</sup>Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, p. 43.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Barth's theology is a vivid contrast, for example, to the somewhat restricted view of Christ in Paul Tillich where Christology is a function of soteriology--Jesus Christ being confined to the role of the "bringer to mankind" of the "New Being" whereby man is saved from the old being. See Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 174.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God, trans. by J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), pp. 43, 47.

aspect of the gospel, admittedly the central one, and over-inflate it to the point where practically everything else is eliminated?"<sup>1</sup>

One cannot help contrasting Barth's new christological concentration with the angry negations of his early theology and look for moderation between these two extremes. The failure of his early theology, as admitted by Barth, was to neglect the message of the joyful Yes of God. Is it not possible that the failure of Barth's recent theology is to ignore or abandon the influence of God's judgment on this doctrine?<sup>2</sup> The pendulum, instead of stopping somewhere between the two extremes, seems to move from one unreasonable position to the opposite. Barth's attitude could almost be interpreted as a call for readers to incorporate the two extremes and make their own moderation.

The new extreme in Barth's christological concentration is seen clearly in his doctrine of election. Election in Barth, in contrast to the speculative doctrine of double predestination as represented in the final edition of Calvin's Institutes, is the good news that we only know our condemnation in the cross of Christ, that as a curse which we deserve

<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xxxix.

<sup>2</sup>Brown acknowledges this failure and says: "Does not Barth's insistence on viewing election Christologically downgrade the emphasis on judgment that is undeniably to be found in the Bible?" Ibid., p. xxxix.

but which by grace Jesus Christ bears on our behalf we have been freed from. Casalis sees the positive feature:

Predestination thus ceases to be the mystery of terror and resignation that has scandalized so many men, and become what it should never have ceased to be---a chapter of the gospel, the good news that in Christ God has fully provided for our destiny, revealing and communicating to us the assurance of a victory that rescues us from eternal damnation.<sup>1</sup>

Casalis has correctly interpreted Barth at this point, because for Barth the gospel is the declaration that man is elected in grace. He makes it clear that as far as what Christ has done, it is universal, inescapable, and unsurpassable.<sup>2</sup> The matter of realization is an open question. For this to happen, the gospel must be preached and the church fulfill its mission. Unbelief is the denial that one is chosen but it in no way alters the fact that one is chosen. Human opposition cannot annul the divine decision.<sup>3</sup> The unbeliever's decision cannot stand equally alongside God's decision but is "overruled." The free God freely made man a free being, but human autonomy is not a rival of the theonomy.<sup>4</sup> Barth's conclusion seems to be to "leave to God" the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 47-50, 81-83.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, II. 2, pp. 13-14, 208.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 184-85.



question of whether all men will be saved or not.<sup>1</sup>

Brown answers the charge that Barth tends toward universalism by a counter charge that "such men seem to need the reassurance of believing that other men . . . will be damned."<sup>2</sup> This is of course no answer at all, and Brown ends in supporting Barth's view that "hell, instead of being amply populated, might one day perhaps be found to be empty."<sup>3</sup> These emotionally loaded ideas can possibly deter one from the real question at stake, which is not whether it would be good or bad for all men to be saved. That this is a joyful possibility, no one would argue, but this does not answer the problem of man's freedom, nor does it offer any refutation to the notion that a doctrine of universal salvation makes man irresponsible.

There is evidence of both error and ambiguity in Barth's treatment of the doctrine of election. Ambiguity is introduced when Barth, aware that the scriptures speak of "election and of rejection,"<sup>4</sup> tries to develop both. He is criticized from an extreme-Calvinistic viewpoint by R. B. Kuiper, who claims to represent the "classical Calvinism"

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<sup>1</sup>Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, pp. 114, 117. See Barth, Dogmatics, II. 2, p. 186, where Barth seems to indicate that to teach an unqualified universal and final election of all would make "God a prisoner of Himself."

<sup>2</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xxx.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, Die Botschaft von der freien Gnade Gottes (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), p. 8. Quoted by Brown in Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xxx.

<sup>4</sup>Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, p. 114.

position. Kuiper finds Barth's error in the "premise" of his doctrine of election and says:

In short, by being inconsistent, rather by adding one inconsistency to another, Barth strives to avoid both the pitfall of unqualified universalism and that of a qualified universalism, which, after the manner of Arminianism, makes God dependent on man.<sup>1</sup>

And, "Here, as elsewhere, the irrationalism of dialectical theology comes clearly to light. Its characteristic 'yes and no' once again prove most confusing."<sup>2</sup>

Berkouwer, who seeks to give Barth the benefit of most doubtful points, must still conclude, "Barth's refusal to accept the apokatastasis cannot be harmonized with the fundamental structure of his doctrine of election."<sup>3</sup> Hans Kung notes the same problem in observing certain "dangerous inclinations" in Barth's theology:

The fundamental motive of Barth, to underline the gracious sovereignty of God in everything, tends in the theology of election toward apokatastasis; in the theology of creation, toward devaluing creaturely self-continuity; in the theology of sin, toward minifying and justifying sin; in the theology of redemption, toward neglecting the ontological and creaturely aspect. In the theology of justification proper, we would mention the tendency to overemphasize the "sinner," "alien justice," the man who is "in hope" at the expense of the "just," "my justice," . . . the tendency to cancel the essential distinction between the just man and the sinner, between the tares and the wheat, between good and bad fish, between believers and unbelievers; the

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<sup>1</sup>R. B. Kuiper, For Whom Did Christ Die? (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 57-58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, p. 116.

tendency to resolve justification into a continuous flux without a sharp break, without the sharp caesura which the Word of God effects in the here and now of the justifying of this particular man; and finally, a tendency to deny a true advance and increase in grace and the possibility of a fall from grace.<sup>1</sup>

After so skillful and perceptive an insight, Kung characteristically defends Barth, which seems to be the purpose of his book in its effort to establish a basis of harmony between Roman Catholic teaching and the theology of Barth,<sup>2</sup> especially with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith. He says:

These trends, while present in Barth's fundamental position, do not become errors nor irresponsible exaggerations. They form the organic inclination of Barthian theology, which in different form is found in Catholic theologians, and even in Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup>

Protestant interpreters of Barth will also note these "dangerous inclinations," and unlike Catholic theologians, will feel no burden to dismiss them on the basis of their prior theological existence. The plain fact is that many of Barth's inclinations as cited by Kung are errors when left as they are stated by Barth, and possibly as intended by him. These "irresponsible exaggerations" are the responsibility of serious students of Barth to detect and question even while

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Kung, Justification, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup>Kung says plainly and to the surprise of Barth and others that "on the whole there is fundamental agreement between the theology of Barth and that of the Catholic Church." Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

appreciating the christological nature of his theology.

There is an "overpowering" characteristic about Barth's Christology that has a binding effect upon man's existence. Barth means to show man's true freedom as realized in Christ, but the impression is that man is "overruled" by God.<sup>1</sup> The climax of Barth's theology is his emphasis upon "Jesus as Victor" where the "triumph of grace," as traced by G. C. Berkouwer, becomes evident. It is here that the real question of man's freedom must be raised. One can acknowledge Barth's description of this freedom, and still must ask if this can be freedom in any ultimate sense when man is confronted with the overpowering grace that is directed toward him by Barth's christological concentration. Berkouwer raises this question even while praising Barth's endeavor.<sup>2</sup> Robert McAfee Brown joins John Bennett and others who regard Barth's interpretation as causing man to be "swamped by grace."<sup>3</sup>

In Barth's theology, to believe in grace is to be thankful, for grace is undeserved blessing. It is unmerited, a gift which man can never deserve but only receive thankfully. The only response left to man in the light of God's wondrous saving act is to be grateful. To do so also means to be willing to receive a gift and to want to share that gift so that

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, pp. 212-14, 263-96.

<sup>3</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xl.

others can be grateful too. God's Yes is spoken in Jesus Christ with such axiomatic certainty that it is his own judicially binding pronouncement,<sup>1</sup> and when we hear it, "we have no option but to receive it and accept its validity."<sup>2</sup> No more problems remain. All that is left for man is gratitude and joy.<sup>3</sup>

The result is that there is no critical function to human thought and response in the revelatory and reconciliation process. The proper relationship of man to the knowledge of God is acknowledgment.<sup>4</sup> Man's role is to stand before God, to listen to the Word, acknowledge, receive, and be grateful, and bear witness. He cannot ask if it is a true light. He is questioned himself, but he cannot question. As to the authenticity of the revelation, it is self-authenticating, so that man does not need to examine its truth. Barth says that man has no place from which to ask whether Jesus Christ is really the true Word. To claim such competence is ipso facto to deny the revelation.<sup>5</sup> Barth's fear that to raise critical questions about revelatory events would be to place divine illumination under human insight is an exaggerated one. It

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 389-91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer, Triumph of Grace, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 72-74.

may signify a more serious view of the event than to stand mute.

Barth admits the use of reason in the knowledge of God. It is not generally knowable in that it is not understood by everyone, but "it is generally intelligible and explicable. For its content is rational and not irrational."<sup>1</sup> This would seem to imply that such knowledge is in this sense reduced to finite knowledge and thus susceptible to error or distortion, but Barth does not admit to this. It would further indicate some responsibility to examine revelation and inquire into the truth of its claims which Barth does not allow. To do so, however, would not have to mean the judging of revelation by human reason but rather the effort to avoid the human tendency to take what is God's and misunderstand it. It would mean the examination of human claims to speak for God as well as the validity of human judgments about him. Barth's own view would seem to allow a greater rational response from man as the Word of God is at work within him and the use of God-given mental faculties in the service of his truth. Barth does so only in relationship to the revelation. He says that man's response to the revelation involves "an awakening and enlightening of the reason," and a logical answer is asked for appropriate to "the logical attitude of God." This means for Barth the "surest kind of knowledge,"

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 849.

but it is clearly not a free independent expression of man's response.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's christological concentration causes other difficulties. He appears arbitrary at times in the employment of discriminating judgments within scripture, distinguishing at times between "saga" and history and offering no criteria for such distinctions. Barth's attachment to the Word, as already observed, and his christological concentration become also his hermeneutical principle, but there are times when its employment becomes arbitrary and thereby suspect. Barth's hermeneutics allows dogmatic considerations to unduly restrict the scope of historical-critical investigation of the scriptures. By viewing the canon as wholly grounded, and thus guarded, in God's action in Jesus Christ, Barth tends to treat it as outside the province of factual historical criticism. S. Paul Schilling points out that the biblical texts could still be carefully investigated without subjecting them to a criticism based on an improper conception of history, and says, "The sole aim of biblical scholarship is the interconnected exegesis of the canonical writings which attest the Christ event."<sup>2</sup> This particular area of weaknesses has given rise to much criticism that Barth's hermeneutics results in a cleavage

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 785. See also Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 312-14, and Barth, Dogmatics, II. 1, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>Schilling, Contemporary Continental Theologians, p. 40.

between dogmatics and exegesis. Barth has no satisfactory explanation for the theological differences that are disclosed by careful historical, critical exegesis of the New Testament writings. Schilling adds, "The conflicts which appear on important issues make it impossible to merge historical with dogmatic truth."<sup>1</sup>

Schilling also points out the difficulty of harmonizing Barth's dominance of Christology with the claims of a fully trinitarian view of God. Barth espouses a modalistic trinitarianism and makes a notable contribution to this doctrine, but it is questionable if he preserves the uniqueness of the Father and the Holy Spirit or their full equality with the Son. The assumption is overwhelming in Barth's concentration that all Christian doctrine must be exclusively the doctrine of Christ. The result, says Schilling, is that Barth's "controlling Christological perspective tends to obscure the differentiations within the divine unity, resulting in a contraction of trinitarian faith."<sup>2</sup>

Barth speaks often of the "Old and New Testament witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ,"<sup>3</sup> and one wonders at times if the Old Testament, according to Barth, has ever witnessed to anything else. Surely it has, and as Robert McAfee Brown says, in questioning whether the Old Testament

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 60.



is as centrally a book about Christ as Barth's exegesis would suggest, "Must it not be read on its own terms, and not merely through Christian eyes?"<sup>1</sup>

Without accepting A. M. Fairweather's interpretation of Barth's view of revelation,<sup>2</sup> it is still possible to agree with his questioning of Barth as to the distinct contribution of the Old Testament and also the revelatory character of Jesus' life on earth. If revelation is identical with Jesus Christ as Barth implies, says Fairweather, then "Barth's contention means that God's self-disclosure must invariably confront men with the precise fulness of grace manifest in Christ."<sup>3</sup> This would cast a serious limitation on the veracity and importance of not only the Old Testament witness but much of the revelatory character of Jesus' life on earth. A doctrine of Christ as Barth seeks to declare needs elaboration and diversification in relationship not only to the Old Testament but in relationship to Christ's role and identification with all of life.

Fairweather points out that for Barth only the transcendent aspect of Christ can be revelation, and while he may fail to appreciate Barth's emphasis whereby the entire event

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<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xxxix.

<sup>2</sup>A. M. Fairweather, The Word as Truth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

of Christ's revelation is transcendent, including the historical, his criticism still has merit. Barth's Christology has an undeniable tendency to rob the Incarnation of its unique character and value in terms of humanity. Fairweather says, "If its worldly aspect is not itself a significant determination of grace, the incarnation accomplishes nothing distinctively its own for the work of redemption."<sup>1</sup>

John McConnachie sees Barth's distrust of what he calls "historism" as a continuing influence in his theology. Barth continues to observe in other theology an over-concern with historical data and events, including the historical Jesus, and chooses rather to seek for the transcendent character of revelation which he finds in the Word and act of God in Jesus Christ. This preference is the heart of Barth's christological concentration and touches upon every critical problem thus far examined.

It is to be acknowledged, however, that with his christological concentration, Barth has continued to move more and more toward the positive side of his emphasis upon the sovereign initiative of God, saying that God has acted in Jesus Christ for man. His Christocentric view of human nature recognizes both the appalling depth of sin and the positive

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. xi. Fairweather is also correct in observing that Biblical exegesis will not substantiate Barth's dogmatic claim either as to the absolute and exclusive identity of God's Word and God's Son, or the confining of revelation to the transcendent. Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

possibilities of man as a child of grace. His emphasis is upon man's relation to Christ and not his sins. Along with this positive emphasis is a detectable linking of his thoughts with Reformed theology, particularly in his attitude toward the church and the sacraments. There are marked challenges by Barth to traditionally interpreted areas of creed and doctrine--Barth has in fact repudiated rational orthodoxy which claims a knowledge of God side by side with other facts of knowledge and would establish the Christian faith on argument, making it an "object" of knowledge rather than a personal question. Barth seeks God as always subject to be known only by his self-revelation, but on the whole he finds a growing rightness in the Reformed theology. The church takes on a new authority in the more recent Barth as opposed to the subjective experience of the individual.<sup>1</sup>

The most positive tribute to be paid to Barth's Christology is to see that his concern, more than that he be correct in every detail of interpretation, is that future generations hear and obey the crucified and risen Lord of all men as the Victor over the emptiness and nothingness of man's independent existence. He has devoted his theology to the

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<sup>1</sup>There is in Barth a detectable strain of distrust for "subjective experience" which Barth regards as a kind of "psychologism"--fearing that it is an anthropocentric center which threatens the objective truth. He believes we cannot see God when we are always looking at ourselves. He reflects a likeness to Calvin over Luther as far as the place he allows for subjective experience.

presentation and proclamation of God's answer to man's problem in the person of Jesus Christ who is the ground and theme and the goal of the Christian hope.

Barth's theology comes to its apex both in terms of strength and limitation in Christology. Critical to the christological argument is Barth's interpretation of the historical Jesus which will be examined in the following chapter. Barth says:

The problem of reconciled man, like that of the reconciling God, has to be based in Christology, and can be legitimately posed and developed and answered only on that basis. It has its roots in the identity of the Son of God with the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, in what this man was and did as such, in what happened to Him as such.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 19.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HISTORICAL JESUS

In developing The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Barth comes to grips with all of the major problems of Christology, including the problem of the historical Jesus, and makes his clearest contribution. Christology is concerned with the problem of Jesus, and the so-called quest of the historical Jesus,<sup>1</sup> old or new, is a part of this problem. The figure of the historical Jesus had already been given excessive concern in the opinion of Barth, but he turns to the problem from a different standpoint, recognizing its proper place in Christology and the Incarnation.

Liberal theology, according to Barth, could only discover a historical figure who was basically an expression of contemporary culture. Professor Torrance says that this attempt resulted in a loss of the very qualities it sought to discover in that "it failed to retain the historical Jesus, for, owing to its philosophical presuppositions, it lost him

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<sup>1</sup>James M. Robinson sees the entire history of German theology inevitably tied to the quest for or rejection of the historical Jesus, and says Harnack's What Is Christianity? provided the theological synthesis at the turn of the century, while Barth's Romans provided a theological break with that theology and set off a new trend in Christology. See James M. Robinson, A New Quest for the Historical Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1959). Hereafter cited as A New Quest.

in the depths of its own subjectivity."<sup>1</sup> The difference between this attempt and that of Barth's new concern, growing out of his interpretation of the Incarnation, is that for Barth, "the historical Jesus Christ is being interpreted out of himself, out of the concrete act of God in Jesus Christ, and not out of our own creative spirituality."<sup>2</sup>

Professor Torrance does not acknowledge that the new quest by contemporary theology for the historical Jesus shows any fundamental difference from the former emphasis which dominated nineteenth-century theology. He sees Barth's attempt as different because of its christological center. Barth has himself come to recognize that in rejecting the classical humanism so much a part of liberal theology, he has left a void. He believes that the "new humanism," in which he includes the entire post-Bultmannian school, the work of Ernst Kasemann,<sup>3</sup> James M. Robinson, and others, would betray his earlier emphasis which he has never denied. The new humanism is too much like the old to suit Barth, so he rejects it in favor of the "humanism of God."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Torrance, Karl Barth, p. 205.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>Barth speaks with respect concerning a part of this endeavor and sees Ernst Kasemann, Professor of New Testament at Tübingen, as the best and most important theologian among the post-Bultmannians. He also speaks favorably of the work of Ernst Fuchs. Barth, How I Changed My Mind, pp. 82-83.

<sup>4</sup>Barth uses the terms die menschlichkeit Gottes (the humanity of God) and die humanismus Gottes (the humanism of God) interchangeably and both refer to the expression of God through the Incarnation.

### The Incarnation

Barth confesses that in his earlier theology he thought only of the apartness of God and felt it necessary to show that the Bible dealt with an encounter between God and man. "What I had to learn," says Barth, "was the togetherness of man and God." This togetherness he finds in the Incarnation which contains the message of the humanism of God.<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ is the Word which became flesh. He is the Word spoken about men, and in the Incarnation there is the union of these two different kinds of being. Barth says that because the Incarnation took place at the center of humanity and human life, it is man's limitation and his destiny.<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation, while a dramatic change of direction, is still consistent with Barth's fundamental concept of revelation in that it is a Christology which interprets the object of its thought in terms of its own objective reality. This objective reality gives to the humanity of Christ, in Barth's view, a significance not found in the historical Jesus of liberal theology, nor in the Jesus of the new quest now being undertaken by New Testament men. Barth says of this endeavor: They "have armed themselves with swords and staves and once again undertaken the search for the 'historical

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Against the Stream, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

Jesus'--a search in which I now as before prefer not to participate."<sup>1</sup> Professor Torrance says of this remark that Barth does not mean that he has no concern for the real historical Jesus, but that the attempt to find a Jesus apart from the gospels, "a Jesus apart from the concrete act of God in Him,"<sup>2</sup> is a failure to understand the New Testament. Torrance defends Barth's effort to interpret the humanity of Christ "out of Himself" and "in accordance with His own being and nature,"<sup>3</sup> which is what Barth endeavors to do. He shows a likeness to Calvin in seeking the "Christ clothed with His gospel," and his rejection is a rejection of an attempt apart from the gospels, an attempt to interpret Jesus from secular sources alone.

It is important to see that Barth is unambiguous in

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 69. Gerhard Ebeling points out that the "new quest for the historical Jesus," as traced by Robinson, is only new in a relative sense, since Bultmann was himself concerned to some degree with the question, and it was Bultmann's pupils who first took up this quest. However, it is more likely that the new direction grew out of a critical interest in Bultmann rather than his direct contribution. To acknowledge Ebeling's view would be to acknowledge that the new quest is really more in the Bultmannian tradition than could ever be possible in the tradition of Barth. While the new quest is not identical with the old liberal school, contrary to Ebeling's opinion, it is based on a similar motive, although it is fair to agree that even the old liberal quest gave evidence of the efforts made to face hermeneutical questions with regard to Christology. See Gerhard Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation, trans. by John Riches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 162-63.

<sup>2</sup>Torrance, Karl Barth, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 208.



declaring the fact of the eternal God actually becoming man in Jesus Christ, entering human history in concrete actuality. The events set in motion by the Incarnation, however, are "salvation history," which we share in faith, and they cannot be substantiated or authenticated by ordinary historical inquiry because they are accessible only to faith. The revelation occurs when man encounters Jesus Christ, because it is really the eternal Christ who is confronted, and the content of the revelation is not the man who receives it (nor the historical Jesus), but the Incarnate Word himself who mediates and establishes it. Even so, the reconciliation of the world to God is in every respect history.<sup>1</sup> Barth's attempt, governed and limited by his whole theological premise, is nonetheless to give full significance to both the human and the divine. He says, "It would be a strange Christology which did not give attention to the true humanity of Christ as to His true deity."<sup>2</sup>

Barth has endeavored from the beginning of his theology to maintain the real humanity of Christ and has not, as some critics imagine, abandoned the fact of the historical Jesus as of no importance to Christology. He very early shows evidence of recognizing that from the historical point of view, Jesus was a man, living within the conditions and

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 181-83.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 19.

limitations of humanity. In taking issue with Harnack and the liberal tradition as to how we should regard and remember Jesus, he does not fail to agree that "we cannot be reminded too often that this man once dwelt in the midst of humanity. In Him we have the central human factor."<sup>1</sup> As far as Jesus' humanity is concerned, however, it is ordinary and not to be singled out as important in itself. Barth says of Jesus' humanity:

Jesus Christ, in fact, is also the Rabbi of Nazareth, historically so difficult to get information about, and when it is obtained, one who is apt to impress us as a little commonplace alongside more than one other founder of a religion and even alongside many later representatives of His own religion.<sup>2</sup>

There is no human quality that Barth admires in Jesus. It is the Christ that is encountered in Jesus that is of importance to him. Barth's emphasis is that it is at the point of the historical that the divine is revealed and known. The relationship between man and God, between this world and his world, becomes observable in Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus.<sup>3</sup> "Jesus of Nazareth," says Barth, "is the point

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 188. Professor Ian Henderson has observed that there must have been something about the actual Jesus at the time of his life to make the New Testament witnesses to summon men to decide for or against him. Barth has moderated this depreciation of the humanity of Jesus to some extent. See Ian Henderson, Myth in the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 29.

at which it can be seen that all the other points form one line of supreme significance. He is the point at which is perceived the crimson thread which runs through all history."<sup>1</sup> It is Barth's insistence that revelation goes beyond this point that causes controversy. He writes:

In so far as our world is touched in Jesus by the other world, it ceases to be capable of direct observation as history, time, or thing. Jesus has been "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Holy Spirit, through His resurrection from the dead." In this declaration and appointment--which are beyond historical definition--lies the true significance of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

This early interpretation is still present in Barth's Christology. It insists that the significance of Jesus is not in his historicity, but that his historicity is important because it is the meeting place for man. The significance of Jesus lies in something other than his humanity. Barth says, "Our discovery of the Christ in Jesus of Nazareth is authorized by the fact that every manifestation of the faithfulness of God points and bears witness to what we have actually encountered in Jesus."<sup>3</sup> Barth believes that the human life of Jesus bears witness to his uniqueness only in its denial of any distinction of its own. He writes:

The life of Jesus is perfected obedience to the will of the faithful God. Jesus stands among sinners as a sinner; He sets Himself wholly under the judgment under which the world is set; He takes His place where God can be present only in questioning about Him; He takes the form of a slave; He moves to the cross and to death; His

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 96.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 29.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

greatest achievement is a negative achievement. He is not a genius, . . . He is not a hero or leader of men; . . . Nevertheless, precisely in this negation, He is the fulfilment of every possibility of human progress, . . . because He sacrifices to the incomparably Greater and to the invisibly Other every claim . . . because there is no conceivable human possibility of which He did not rid Himself.<sup>1</sup>

It is this "self-emptying" that Barth recognizes as the Christ. This is a key concept to his Christology and is consistently maintained, although moderated in his more recent emphasis. It is beautifully developed in his Epistle to the Philippians where Barth says:

God's equal has found his right in this--that in His abasement and humiliation He is Lord over all. God has found His glory in this, that He prepares His kingdom in incomprehensible condescension.<sup>2</sup>

In this view, Barth points out that this bars the door to all attempts to penetrate and comprehend the divinity of the man Jesus directly on our own account. He warns against an effort to interpret Jesus from his humanity:

To take the picture of His abasement and humiliation, . . . something that from the human point of view is directly evident and compelling, and then to find in that (say, in the ethos of His obedience) His exaltation, to see in that His Lordship--that is not the way to understand Jesus as Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Barth's interpretation of the veiled nature of revelation and his doctrine of the "divine incognito" were all a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Philippians, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

part of his efforts to move away from nineteenth-century Christology, and he exaggerates his case. His intent was to avoid uniting the historical and the divine in such a way as to create a "fusion of God and man" or an "exaltation of humanity to divinity."<sup>1</sup> His manner of doing so, however, makes understandable Donald Baillie's criticism that to Barth, "The human life of Jesus is not a revelation of God, but a concealment of God."<sup>2</sup>

It hardly seems necessary to make the humanity of Jesus a concealment of God, especially if we view the lordship of Jesus as having a real relationship to his humanity through the Incarnation. The New Testament statement of the Incarnation makes it impossible to set apart the two natures. Barth's picture of a veiled Christ, in which the historical Jesus is not a revelation of God, means for Baillie that the episode of the Incarnation did not convey any fresh revelation of the nature and activity of God.<sup>3</sup> Such a view, says Baillie, would almost lead one to say that Barth's theology does not take the Incarnation seriously. It builds upon the Word of God, but there is question, says Baillie, if it builds upon the Word

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Baillie, God Was in Christ, p. 36. See also Pauk, Karl Barth, p. 195. Baillie's christological attempt falls into what Barth is denying as possible, to see the lordship of Christ in the "ethos of His obedience" or a characteristic of his humanity.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

made flesh. He says that Barth

has reacted so violently against the "Jesus of history" movement that he does not seem interested in the historical Jesus at all. His theology has become so austere a theology of the Word that . . . it is hardly a theology of the Word-made-flesh.<sup>1</sup>

This criticism, despite Barth's efforts to overcome it—even to the point of introducing new and remarkable innovations in his thought, is still a most serious and unresolved problem for his theology. Barth succeeds in including man in the Incarnation by making clear that it is an event for man, but he is less than successful in making clear that the Incarnation means an actual assumption of human nature.

Barth's emphasis with regard to the death of Christ is in company with his concept of self-abasement. His early statement is to the effect that "the life of Christ is His oboedientia passiva, His death on the cross. It is completely and solely and exclusively His death on the Cross."<sup>2</sup> Jesus, according to Barth, had no knowledge that helped him to see the significance of his life and did not, as he faced his passion, even succeed in seeing "a frontier, a meaning, a future, in what He had to suffer."<sup>3</sup> Barth reflects the extreme characteristic of his early theology as he argues that nothing in Jesus' personality, or even his words or deeds "exist in their

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 53.    <sup>2</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, Credo, trans. by J. Strathearn McNab (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1936), pp. 76-78.

own right," but that everything "shines in the light of His death."<sup>1</sup> Barth thinks it necessary to show the negation by Jesus of all human achievement, and the death of Christ is that which separated him from historical existence. In order to die, he abandoned and left behind all concrete, human, historical possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

Barth has the same objective in developing the death of Christ always in relationship with his resurrection: "He is the Risen-Crucified One,"<sup>3</sup> and, "The conception of resurrection emerges with the conception of death, with the conception of the end of all historical things as such."<sup>4</sup> Barth has moved away from this extreme in his emphasis upon the "concrete-historical" nature of the event of God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ, but his reservations as to the historical possibilities of this event remain.

The death of Christ as developed very recently by Barth is still the complete fulfillment of his human abasement. Barth says:

In virtue of this humiliation of God, as He became mean and poor, as His eternal Word was made flesh, and took human essence and existed as a man among men, this man, Jesus of Nazareth, was and is elevated and exalted man, true man. He was and is this unique man among all others, this Sovereign. His human work runs parallel to the work of God.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 292.

This emphasis is the heart of Barth's new Christology. Christ became real man but in God-man fashion. "The Word was really made real flesh," says Barth, but we must remember, "It was really God who really reconciled the world to Himself--in the One who was true God, omnipotent in the depth of His mercy, also (in His death and passion) true man, allowing free rein to this omnipotent mercy of God."<sup>1</sup> The death of Christ reveals that because it was for man, it was an act of God.<sup>2</sup> Barth says, "The secret of the cross is simply the secret of the Incarnation in all its fulness."<sup>3</sup> It is clear that, for Barth, locked in this secret, there is a distinction between the "real flesh" of Jesus Christ and that of humanity.

The difficulty of finding an identity between historical humanity and that of the Incarnation must be acknowledged. As if to anticipate the question, Barth asks, "How can the unknown become for us the known reality, reality in truth? How can there be a perception of Jesus Christ and our being in Him?"<sup>4</sup> How do we see that which is concealed? Barth's answer is to warn, "One thing is sure . . . no penetration to the truth is in fact possible from our side. For this mystery is a matter of His will and power and act."<sup>5</sup> What was accomplished in the death of Christ is a matter of God's free decision to make known. Barth says:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 292-93.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 293.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 297.      <sup>5</sup>Ibid.



His decision cannot be influenced or directed or breached by any of our decisions, however profound or forceful either in design or execution. He and He alone is His own truth. This door cannot be opened from outside, but only from inside. It cannot be opened by us, but only by the One who closed it.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's principle of divine sovereignty is as strong at this point as at any time in his theology. Man cannot even discuss his situation outside this door, considering what is possible or impossible, because "this type of discussion cannot lead anywhere."<sup>2</sup>

Barth's answer to what seems an impasse is to say that the New Testament overcomes this abstraction by declaring that the crucified Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. This is the flinging open of the closed door.<sup>3</sup> This answer is not new to Barth's theology. It is the same emphasis upon God's sovereign grace that is encountered throughout his theology. It is meant to break through into man's concrete reality, but it is limited at the very point where it is intended to break through. If the Incarnation is really the introduction of God into human life, it would seem that in that event God does become known, and from man's side, but this conclusion is not allowed in Barth's interpretation.

#### Historical Man

How much has Barth moved away from the extremes of his early theology with regard to the humanity of Jesus?

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Much of his change of direction touches upon the question of Jesus' humanity in that it is an effort to show the togetherness of God and man. His Christology is an attempt to resolve the antithesis between divine and human existence, and it does so by calling man into a new kind of being as reflected in Christ. The anthropological significance of the gospel is directly related, therefore, to the problem of the historical Jesus.

Barth's purpose is to stress the humanity of Jesus as evidence of the lordship of Christ over humanity, thus the title, "Jesus Christ, the Servant as Lord,"<sup>1</sup> and at the same time avoid the danger of losing sight of the sovereignty of Christ in his treatment of man. It was human nature that Christ assumed when he became man, says Barth, and there is an identity between the humanity of Christ and that of other men, but it is to be understood from the humanity of Christ and not man. Barth says that what human nature is can only be learned from Christ and not from an interpretation of general anthropology or a doctrine of man in general.<sup>2</sup>

In seeking real man in the human nature of Jesus, Barth makes it clear that there can be no question of equating

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Doctrines, IV. 1, pp. 157ff.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Doctrines, IV. 2, pp. 25-26. Barth denies that there is any such understanding of man from a human standpoint. In Jesus we have not only the human significance of the gospel but an understanding of what the term human really means. Ibid.

human nature with that of Jesus and therefore that there can be no question of a simple deduction of anthropology from Christology.<sup>1</sup> Although Jesus has the same nature as men have, he has it in a different way. In him is the peace and clarity that men lack. His humanity was without sin, of a royal nature, and without the self-contradiction and self-deception which afflict mankind. When he became man, he did not cease to be the Son of God. Because of this, even as a man, he stands in a unique relationship to God.

Barth argues that this does not imply that the constitution of the human nature of Jesus is different from man's but only that his human nature operates differently from man's--in the way God willed and created it. That is the reason he can serve as the source and basis of our knowledge of the true nature of man. Barth leaves a gap, however, between ordinary man and the humanity of Jesus--a gap that he endeavors to fill by emphasizing man's reconciliation in Christ and by denying that ordinary humanity is man's real and actual nature.

Barth's doctrine of man's created nature is that it is inalienable, that it is not destroyed or altered by sin. Man cannot lose or alter his nature by sinning, since the basis of his nature is just that event in which the possible damage was repaired in advance. Human nature is first Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, pp. 47ff.

Christ's. We are human only because we participate in his nature, because he is man for our sake. Because he is eternally for sinners, our sinning does not destroy our identity with him, nor our human nature.<sup>1</sup>

The human nature of Christ is thus the key to understanding the nature of man himself, but not vice versa, and the humanity of Christ is inseparable from his divinity. When one speaks of the human nature of Christ, he must take into account his divinity. Barth's interpretation is such as to conclude that the divinity of Christ gives his humanity more than human significance. It is not that Christ's human nature is deified by the divine, but it is determined by it, and this may mean much the same thing. The human nature is confronted by the divine, in such a way as to determine it without altering its essence.<sup>2</sup> This unity of the human and the divine in Jesus Christ makes possible the exaltation of man, not to a place of deity but to fellowship with God and to "full participation in His glory."<sup>3</sup> Barth seems to mean by this a superior kind of manhood, as evidenced in the manhood of Jesus, but of the basic substance or essence which would still distinguish it as manhood.

This does not mean that man is to attempt to unite his existence with that of Jesus Christ, and here Barth is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 50, 274ff., 319-21.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 86-95.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

attempting to show the difference between what he is saying from a Christocentric standpoint and an anthropocentric one.

He says:

It is true that what took place in Him . . . does embrace Christian existence and in a certain sense all human existence. But if we are to look and think and speak more precisely it is not a redemption happening which embraces both Him and us, but the redemptive happening which embraces us in His existence, which takes us up into itself.<sup>1</sup>

This is Barth's answer to the problem of faith and history.

It is to see the atonement as the determination of man's history. This allows Barth to think of the existence of man as determined by the saving event of the death of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

His emphasis upon the work of justification by Jesus is to show that it is not only completely his work but also to show it completely his work for man, to such an extent that man is no longer unrighteous but righteous before God.

Barth reflects the difficulty, as well as the ambiguity, of his newly developed position when he says:

But if we keep to the particular humanity in which Jesus Christ gives Himself to be known, we must first make the formal differentiation that it is characterized by the fact that it is completely like and yet also completely unlike that of other men.<sup>3</sup>

Barth is never completely free from the dialectic which insisted on the real difference between God and man, a difference which now becomes a problem in the Incarnation. Should it be

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 229.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 27.

maintained in a doctrine of the Incarnation, or, indeed, can it be maintained and there be a real Incarnation? How can any humanity, even Christ's, be "completely like and yet also completely unlike that of other men"? It does not seem possible, especially if "he is man totally and unreservedly as we are"<sup>1</sup> as Barth also maintains.

Barth's entire discussion is permeated with reservations concerning the humanity of Christ. He is not only a true man, but the true man.<sup>2</sup> He becomes unlike other men in the particularity of the history which took place when he became a man. Because the Son of man was also the Son of God, he is the same as we are, but quite differently.<sup>3</sup> His is an exalted humanity, and the fact that our own humanity has been exalted with his makes it the same as ours, but the problem is that man's exaltation is not yet visible except in Christ. How do we address the "real," "exalted," or "true" humanity of Christ to the visible and somewhat profane humanity of historical man?

The fact that Jesus is the symbol and example of true humanity<sup>4</sup> is not a substitute for what one would think of as

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 28. Barth says that because Jesus was also God, he was able not only to be God but also to be this man, and because he was God, it was necessary for him to be a man quite differently from all other men. See Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 12, 180-83.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 25-30.

ordinary humanity. The gospel must touch that part of man which is, not what should be. There is serious question as to whether, in Barth's theology, "Jesus Christ comes to us in full humanity" as one is asked to believe. This critical question may be decisive in any evaluation of Barth's theology. The Dutch Catholic theologian, Dr. B. A. Willems, sees the key to Barth's christological supposition, which is fundamental to his theology, to be his view of the humanity of Christ and says: "It will probably turn out that everything depends on how one judges the humanity of Christ."<sup>1</sup> He points out the "danger that becomes acute as soon as Christ's humanity is being identified too unproblematically with God."<sup>2</sup>

Insofar as Barth is speaking about the Incarnation as event, he finds agreement, but what about the consequences of this event? Is it not necessary to now acknowledge that in the person of Jesus Christ, God has assumed a human nature that is a coactive subject in the activity of Christ? When the Incarnation becomes historical event and activity, is it still possible to insist to the degree that Barth does upon the sole activity of God? This insistence is to the degree that Christ's human nature is either minimized or redefined.

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<sup>1</sup>B. A. Willems, Karl Barth: An Ecumenical Approach to His Theology, trans. by Matthew J. von Velzen (Glen Rock, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1965), p. 109. Hereafter cited as Karl Barth.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

The humanity of Christ, as well as human history itself, belongs, according to Barth, within the act of God. It is to be brought into and under the revelation of God in Christ, and this is where Barth finds his greatest challenge. How does one manage to bring human history and the humanity of man into the same act of God with the humanity of Christ without first bringing the humanity of Christ into the same category with the humanity of man? The whole idea of the humanity of Jesus as a "mirror" of the divine<sup>1</sup> implies a distance between two spheres of existence, one higher than the other. The idea of reflection appears throughout Barth's Christology and extends to that which the Word of God assumed in the Incarnation---the humanity of Christ.

This leads Robert W. Jenson to question, despite Barth's intent and protestations, "Is there not a danger that in Barth's hands Christ's history threatens to turn into something mightily resembling a metaphysical idea?"<sup>2</sup> For Barth, God's history with man is the history of God and man "in" the person of Jesus Christ. Jenson's criticism is to offer as a superior idea:

Might it not be that the history of God with man in Jesus Christ is not in the first place God's history with man-in-Christ but the history of God-in-Christ with mankind? Might it not be that the starting point is not what God

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, pp. 243ff., 258, 267ff.

<sup>2</sup>Jenson, Alpha and Omega, pp. 167-68.



does to Jesus but what He does through Jesus? Might it not be that Jesus' history indeed creates and determines all history, but less as the history which includes all history than as the history which makes all history.<sup>1</sup>

The contribution that Jenson makes to this particular problem in Barth's view of the Incarnation is to allow one to follow Barth in his valuable suggestions toward a christological ontology whereby he develops a vision of man's life and the world as interpreted and grounded in Christ. It would at the same time, however, insist that Christ the incarnate Word became flesh and that he lived before he became man, even as he lives eternally as man, and it is this progression of his life that is our being. Jenson would further emphasize that the field of our history and reality is the action of God in Christ upon us. The confrontation of God-in-Christ with mankind must not be subordinated to the majestic event as it relates to God. It is this confrontation with man which makes it majestic for both God and man, and it is this confrontation which makes us real.<sup>2</sup>

Herbert Hartwell also notes Barth's failure to make a distinction between the Son of God as the designate God-man Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ as very God and very man. Barth means to stress the continuity between the Son of God and Jesus Christ and thus their identity, "but the language used by him," says Hartwell, "to that end is, theologically, open to question

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

since according to his own teaching Jesus Christ, in contrast to the Son of God, existed before the Incarnation only in the thought and will of God."<sup>1</sup> Hartwell also points out that the proposition that the Son of God is the subject of the person of Jesus Christ cast a doubt upon the true humanity of Jesus. Barth asserts the exclusively divine nature of the subject and being of Jesus Christ in such a way as to bring into question the real humanity of Jesus. Barth's argument that individuality and not person is necessary to human nature, and that humanity means the nature or essence of man whereas personality means the existence of a man, and that the latter but not the former is determined and expressed by the subject, is not adequate as a defense.<sup>2</sup> There is no such thing as an abstract human nature. It must be defined in terms of man and not God if it is to be actual. Barth's insistence that human nature be defined from revelation, or from the humanity of Christ, means that one does not have a description of visible, ordinary humanity. The Incarnation in Barth's theology is the revelation of God to man, but not in the traditional idea of man being included as man in the Incarnation. The Incarnation instead is the exaltation of man, and he is included as exalted man.

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<sup>1</sup>Hartwell, Theology of Karl Barth, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 185ff.

The Royal Man

Jesus Christ is the mediator. He acts between the God who loves the world and the world which is loved by God, and while this seems to give equal emphasis to the divine and the human in Christ, it does not. Jesus Christ is the act of God and not an act of man, and in the act of reconciliation Jesus Christ is acting not as man but as God. Because of this, the doctrine of reconciliation has to do "wholly and utterly with Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> He is the beginning and the middle and the end. This eliminates the possibility of any inquiry into the nature of faith, or love, or any other virtue apart from God. This would not be true if the act of Jesus Christ were the act of a man, even, it would seem, if it were the action of God in man. This would allow an inquiry into the nature of faith or human response, but Jesus Christ in Barth's Christology is not God in man, he is God in a particular man--the royal man. According to Barth:

We shall speak correctly of the faith and love and hope of the individual Christian only when it remains clear and constantly becomes clear that, although we are dealing with our existence, we are dealing with our existence in Jesus Christ as our true existence, that we are therefore dealing with Him and not with us, and with us only as far as absolutely and exclusively with Him.<sup>2</sup>

Barth's Christology says that God became man but

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

"without ceasing to be God."<sup>1</sup> The "humanity of God" therefore is not the same as our humanity, although Barth tries to interpret our humanity as being like his. This is his christological center. When he appraises this concept as interpreted by Frans Reinhold Frank, he criticizes Frank for a view which "alters ever so slightly the Christian message" in what seems to Barth a tendency to separate the humanity of God from the very being and person of God. Barth says,

But while it is true that He does serve this end, does this exhaust what He is for it and in relation to it? Ontologically is it not a matter of Him first, and only then and in Him of the "humanity of God"?<sup>2</sup>

These remarks indicate the extremeness of Barth's distinction. Barth's lifelong principle of divine sovereignty asserts and dominates his theological judgment even in the matter of God's "humanity."

God intervenes in man's behalf as a man. He becomes Emmanuel, "God with us." Jesus Christ is God, God as man, and therefore "God with us" men, God in the work of reconciliation.<sup>3</sup> If one questions, What kind of man did God become, Barth answers, He was the royal man. Jesus was the exalted Son of Man. He was among men as a man, like his contemporaries, but men saw him as the Lord, as the royal man.<sup>4</sup> Barth says,

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 125.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 161. By use of the title, the "royal man," Barth refers to the "kingly office" of Jesus,

"He was unmistakably marked off from other men."<sup>1</sup> His uniqueness does not mean, according to Barth, that he is any less historical. The royal man was Jesus Christ who was not only the Son of God but also the Son of Man, the man Jesus of Nazareth. Barth says that his starting point for understanding this royal man is "the fact of the existence and history, attested in the New Testament, of the One who as the true Son of God was and is and will be also the Son of Man, the true and new and royal man."<sup>2</sup> He was present in, says Barth, and made history.

The presence of this royal man in history, however, was in contrast to other men--not in being any less historical, or any less human, but nevertheless different from other men. Barth sees the witness of the gospels as pointing to Jesus' humanity in relationship to his being also the "Son of God" and, therefore, "as an earthly reality of the first and supreme order."<sup>3</sup> His presence in history could not be

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saying that his presence carried also the presence of the kingdom of God and made him absolutely unique and unforgettable.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 161. Barth's description of the royal man is in many ways in sharp contrast to the demeaning of the historical figure of Jesus noted in his early theology. He continues to say that "among other men this One who is truly exalted is not as such a great man" (ibid., p. 167), but there is less of the antithesis between sovereignty and historicity.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 165. It is important to see what Barth means by this description. He is an earthly reality in that he lived as any other man concretely in time and space, but he was "of the first and supreme order" in that he was created "after God." He showed what a creature, a man, really is and what God intends.

ignored;<sup>1</sup> it called for a decision,<sup>2</sup> and it could not be forgotten.<sup>3</sup> Barth says:

Why was this the case, and in what respect? The answer is that He was among His fellow-men as the Lord, the royal man. To be sure, He was a man as they were. He did not enjoy or exercise divine sovereignty or authority or omnipotence. But all the same He was its full and direct witness. And as such He was unmistakably marked off from other men.<sup>4</sup>

And further:

There is no doubt at all that a real human person is seen and described in them. But everything that characterizes it as such is so singular, so out of scale in relation to other human persons, so unique and to that extent alien, that there are no categories in which to grasp it.<sup>5</sup>

This uniqueness is described by Barth as nothing less than

God-like:

There is not discernible stratum of the New Testament in which--always presupposing His genuine humanity--Jesus is in practice seen in any other way . . . than as the One who is qualitatively different and stands in an indissoluble antithesis to His disciples and all other men, indeed to the whole cosmos. There is no discernible stratum which does not in some way witness that it was felt that there should be given to this man, not merely a human confidence, but that trust, that respect, that obedience, that faith which can properly be offered only to God.<sup>6</sup>

Barth emphasizes the freedom of Jesus, the royal man. He was completely free, as no other man, to do the will of his Father, not being bound by any power of nature or history.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 157.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 161.      <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>6</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 161.

<sup>7</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 161.

His freedom made him superior over the temporal order. Jesus revealed the limit and frontier of all systems and summoned men to the freedom of the kingdom of God. He did so by exercising a freedom and authority over all existing patterns and systems. Barth writes:

Why His existence was so unsettling on every side was that He set all programmes and principles in question. And He did this simply because He enjoyed and displayed, in relation to all the orders positively or negatively contested around Him, a remarkable freedom which again we can only describe as royal.<sup>1</sup>

Barth goes on to trace this superiority of Jesus in the New Testament over the economic and political order of the world, saying, "In all these dimensions the world is concretely violated by God Himself in the fact that the man Jesus came into it and is now within it."<sup>2</sup>

The freedom of Jesus is the key to understanding his death and passion. Barth gives importance to this point and emphasizes that Jesus' life is to be understood in terms of his passion.<sup>3</sup> The passion of Jesus is an enactment that, while it takes place within human history, is not really "in the main theater of world history, but in the vineyard of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> It is a divine act within human history, and although it takes place within human history, it is God's act and drama. This concept is clearly central to Barth's thinking and links

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 252-54.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

everything he has written earlier in his theology to what he is stating now and leaves the interpreter of his work to search for the degree of historical significance in Barth's Christology. It is an elusive search.

Barth's intent is clear. Historical relevance is to be found in the fact that the royal man, Jesus, is free to be "for men." Barth develops the positive fact that the royal man Jesus is the image and reflection of the divine Yes to man and his cosmos.<sup>1</sup> It is a divine Yes spoken in the existence and act of the man Jesus. He is not merely one man with others, but the man for others.<sup>2</sup> The significance of Jesus, the royal man, is the new direction for Barth's theology. The great significance of this royal man--who seems set against the world of men--is that, like God himself, he is not against men but for them. The royal man is not any less the source of revelation, or of sovereign grace, than was the "wholly other" of Barth's early theology. He becomes historically observable in the incarnate Christ who exists for man. The uniqueness of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 180, 269-82, passim.

<sup>2</sup>Barth's accent upon this descriptive phrase summarizes the real difference between his Christology and that of radical theology. For Barth, the emphasis is upon the uniqueness of Jesus that allows him to be the man for others, while for radical theology, the emphasis is upon the role of Jesus--the human expression of his life--in being the man for others. It should be noted that Barth does acknowledge that the act of Jesus as one of reconciliation is revealed in his speech (ibid., pp. 195-209), his actions, i.e., miracles and works (ibid., pp. 227-32). The difference is that for Barth they are christologically determined--rather than determining Christology.



royal man is not meant to remove him from the human situation or make him opposed to man but just the opposite. Barth writes:

The man Jesus is the royal man in the fact that He is not merely one man with others but "the" man for them (as God is for them), the man in whom the love and faithfulness and salvation and Glory of God are addressed to man in the concrete form of a historical relationship of man to man.<sup>1</sup>

The divine Yes is echoed by the royal man Jesus as he confronts sinful man in his misery. "God grapples with sin as He has mercy on the men who suffer in this way as sinners,"<sup>2</sup> says Barth. The incarnate Jesus is therefore the mercy of God as it confronts man's sins, so that:

The man Jesus is decisively created after God in the fact that He is as a man the work and revelation of the mercy of God, of His gospel, His kingdom of peace, His atonement, and that He is His creaturely and earthly and historical correspondence in this sense.<sup>3</sup>

The message that goes out in and with the existence of the man Jesus is therefore one of joy, for what meets man in Jesus is the redemptive mercy of God.

An anthropological sphere of man becomes also the sphere of God through the Incarnation. The "direction of the Son" is His existence and thereby the transformation of man's sphere of existence. The royal man directs the power of God into the world of man.<sup>4</sup> His being as the Son of Man is his being with

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 180-81.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

us, and his action is as such his action for us: "As the Son of Man Jesus is already within our anthropological sphere and already embraces and controls it."<sup>1</sup>

The important consequence of this is that Barth does not treat the existence of Jesus Christ "from an alien or neutral place," and "we cannot even think of treating as an open question the operative and effective power of the existence of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> It is linked inseparably to man's world and man's existence, but "it has its basis in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."<sup>3</sup> Within this concept is Barth's most recent interpretation of transcendent deity as it relates to man and the world. It is not an isolated deity and cannot be treated as such. It is deity in the world, but the fact that its historical expression is the resurrection means that its worldly expression is a transforming one. It shows itself in resurrection. The name Jesus means that God's revelation is historical; it is for man, but his name is Jesus Christ, meaning divine power. The name Jesus is the direction of the Son-- toward man. Barth says,

It is the fact that we are the ones who are reached and affected by the existence of the Son of Man Jesus Christ. It is the fact that we are the ones to whom He is already on the way as the Resurrected.<sup>4</sup>

It is always in this context, in relation to the power and lordship of the royal man Jesus, that we can go on to speak about

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

ourselves. To speak about ourselves apart from him, God's revelation, is impossible.

It is correct to conclude that Barth's anthropological and social concerns are fundamentally and completely Christocentric. The fact that he endeavors to lift all of humanity into the Christ event is witness to the magnitude of its development. He asks:

Was it just the isolated history of this one man? This is certainly the case, for what took place and has to be noted as this communication between divine and human being, and activity in this One was and is only, as the reconciliation of man with God by God's own Incarnation, His own history and not that of any other man. But for all its singularity, as His history it was not and is not a private history, but a representative and therefore public. His history is the place of all other men and in accomplishment of their atonement; the history of their Head, in which they all participate. Therefore, in the most concrete sense of the term, the history of this One is world history. When God was in Christ He reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5.19), and therefore us, each one of us. In this One humanity itself, our human essence, was and is elevated and exalted.<sup>1</sup>

The problem with such a breath-taking and majestic view of divine-world history is simply to ask if it is possible. Can the entire history of the world be brought into a christological interpretation? Where does profane and non-Christian events and happenings fit into such a view? How is the presence of evil and suffering to be explained on this basis? How is this interpretation to be harmonized with the crisis of Barth's early theology where the divine majesty now

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

described as being for man was regarded as in opposition to man's history? Was there nothing essential in that early crisis, and if so, what is its place in Barth's new interpretation?

There are several things which should be brought out in an attempt to evaluate Barth's view of the historical Jesus. On the positive side, it should be recognized that Barth has presented an interpretation that is genuinely existential.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barth has sought to free his theology from the influence of existential philosophy, but primarily as a source of determining truth and not as a means of expressing it. The influence of Kierkegaard was to note the absolute distinction between God and man, reflected in Barth's Romans in the nature of the "awfulness and glory" of the gospel. Religion is not academic, but passionate, personal, and inward. It begins in personal choice and existential decision. Barth would no longer say that "truth is subjectivity and subjectivity is truth," but it is correct to say that Barth's concept of the truth is existentially arrived at. It has evolved from the proving grounds of his own practical experience and is therefore not a mere theoretical postulation devoid of the life and death encounter with man's existence. Barth has endeavored to forge a theology that will provide man with the adequate resources to face the varied crises of his existence. It was not fashioned in a setting of unchallenged academic ease but always closely connected with the pulpit and the real world of experience and encounter. This is one of the great strengths of Barth's theology. It has been described as the theology of a pilgrim and one for the pilgrim, and it encounters man in an existential fashion. The reconciliation of Christ is an event for me and for us. Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 106-7.

Traces of existential categories as a means of expressing human existence are still central to Barth. The "authentic" existence described by Martin Heidegger and other existentialist philosophers, for example, is somewhat parallel to the "true" or "real" existence and humanity of Christ. The idea of a man being called in Jesus Christ from a life of falsehood, where he has tried to "live a lie" as an unbeliever, to a life of truth is altogether consistent with the concepts of "un-authentic" versus "authentic" existence. See Barth, Dogmatics, II. 2, p. 317. Cf. Martin Heidegger, Existence and Being, trans. and with an Introduction by Werner Brock (London: Vision Press, Ltd., 1949), pp. 69-78.

While he accepts the dogmatic assertions of the early church as to the divine and human natures of Christ as being necessary to a proper understanding of Christology, he has interpreted these assertions, not as a static essence<sup>1</sup> but rather as the action of God which takes place in Jesus Christ.

Because Barth views the Incarnation as the action of God within the person of Christ, he can interpret his person and his work as one. What he is is his work for men as well as his deeds. He is the man for others because he is the Christ, and because he is the Christ, he is for others. The strength of this view is reflected in Barth's statement:

His life was His act, and it has therefore the character of history. The community in which the New Testament originated looked back to this history, which was also its present and future. No distinction was then made, as later, between His person and work. It looked to His completed work, which was regarded as of absolute significance as the work of this person. And it looked to His person, which was regarded as of absolute significance as the Subject of this work. In His history, and therefore in His life as this act, Jesus was there for His community, not only as past, but also as present and future. The totality of His being in its scope for them and the whole world was identical with the totality of His activity.<sup>2</sup>

It must also be acknowledged that Barth has succeeded in accomplishing in Christology what he set out to do in

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<sup>1</sup>The traditional statements of the Incarnation, which express the orthodox paradox of the two natures, has too often been nothing more than a mystical dogma of static essence which is almost impossible to understand and even more difficult to make existential. Donald Baillie's God Was in Christ is a worthwhile attempt, but it falls short of Barth's view.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 193.

theology---to reveal the glory of God. Helmut Gollwitzer sees this achievement and says, "The theme of Barth is God as He has revealed Himself to the world in Jesus Christ according to the witness of Scripture."<sup>1</sup> There is a triumphant beauty in everything that Barth declares, and all of it points to Christ. The royal man is a fitting summary to this majestic and victorious Lord. He is a God who has drawn near to man, and is for man a God who speaks an eternal and positive Yes to man, but nevertheless is the same deity who is also the Lord over all of Barth's theology. A careful reading of the Church Dogmatics will disclaim any thought that Barth's new interest in the "humanity of God" is an about face for him in theology. It is not. It is a carrying through<sup>2</sup> of the theme of the sovereign grace---the deity---of God.

This theme, carried out in Christology, has the strength of preserving much that is necessary to revealed theology. When it is placed alongside the Christology which is representative of nineteenth-century liberalism, or the revival of this Christology as seen in contemporary radical theology, this strength becomes apparent. The royal man of Barth's Christology is not merely the man who becomes us to God, nor is he the man who

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<sup>1</sup>Helmut Gollwitzer, Introduction to Karl Barth's Dogmatics, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Humanity of God, p. 44.

was elevated<sup>1</sup> to a place of divinity. He is God, who, because he is God, can also become man. Although no longer transcendent, he is now God in his immanence.

The "man for others," as described by Bishops Robinson and Pike and the radical theologians Thomas J. J. Altizer, William Hamilton, Paul van Buren, and others,<sup>2</sup> is a fundamentally

<sup>1</sup>Barth gives a convincing argument against the theory that Jesus was exalted to a place of divinity in the Christian community, pointing to the difficulties of such a theory in the light of our understanding of the original Palestinian community. Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 160-63.

<sup>2</sup>These men represent the most radical direction of contemporary theology as it is expressed in "the gospel of Christian atheism" and the "death of God." See Thomas J. J. Altizer, The Gospel of Christian Atheism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966); William Hamilton, The New Essence of Christianity (New York: Association Press, 1961); Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963). Other important names are connected with this movement of theology, notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer and contemporary figures Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), and Gabriel Vahanian. John Macquarrie links together the names of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Ronald Gregor Smith with those of Harvey Cox and Paul van Buren in their concern for the secular. Balthasar, Word and Revelation, Introduction. Britain's Bishop Robinson and America's Bishop Pike also belong in company with the aims and directions of this theology.

There is, of course, a wide variance of position within this direction of radical theology, but that associated with Altizer, Hamilton, and van Buren would have to be judged as in basic agreement and as being the most radical expression within contemporary Christian theology. While the theology of Paul Tillich has played a major role in shaping this theology, many acknowledge Karl Barth's influence as a more critical one, if for no other reason than that these theologians have "polarized themselves negatively on his theology." John Charles Cooper, The Roots of Radical Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 126. It is in this spirit that John Macquarrie has referred to the "God is dead" theologians as "disappointed Barthians." John Macquarrie, "The Problem of God in Its Contemporary Setting" (Lecture delivered by Professor Macquarrie at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of Austin, Texas, Jan. 16, 1968).

different person from the "eternal Son" of Barth's theology. The Son of God who became man did not do so only by an event within the created world. According to Barth, the subject of it must be regarded as existing before all time.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental difference in these two Christologies is really the classic distinction with regard to the nature of Christ's being. Contemporary radical theology is concerned with the question of Christ's divinity in terms of activity and deeds rather than ontologically. While Barth does not admit to a direct concern with ontology, he does maintain the orthodox confession of Jesus Christ as being of the "same substance" ( $\acute{\omicron}\mu\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\varsigma$ ) (as opposed to  $\acute{\omicron}\mu\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\varsigma$  -- "similar") with the Father.<sup>2</sup> In this interpretation of  $\acute{\omicron}\mu\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\varsigma \tau\tilde{\omega} \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\acute{\iota}$ , Barth is not "neo-orthodox," but simply orthodox, and makes his final appeal to Luther's classic explanation of the nature of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Pike's interpretation of Christology represents an effort to give expression to the genuine historical nature of Christ's humanity that results in a marked antithesis to Barth's Christology. Pike sees the major problem in Christology

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Doctrines, I. 1, pp. 448, 474-512, passim. Barth issues a warning against an "untheological speculative" way of regarding the "for us." Ibid., pp. 481-83. He reflects his resistance to the possibility of a self-centered concern in Christology that would lessen the "God-ward" nature of this event, saying, "Jesus Christ does not first become the Son of God by being for us. He becomes so from all eternity." Ibid., pp. 488-89.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 501-5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 505-6.



as being historically a matter of denying the real humanity of Jesus more than a denial of his divinity, and he traces the major heresies as revolving around this tendency. He feels it necessary to declare the particularity of Jesus as the historical revelation of God but also sees it necessary to deny the finality of Jesus as a particular person in history,<sup>1</sup> stating that such finality belongs only to God.

Pike remains "orthodox," at least to his own satisfaction, by admitting and emphasizing the particularity of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God,"<sup>2</sup> but stresses that we cannot deny that God could make such a full revelation known "otherwise."<sup>3</sup> We cannot say, according to this interpretation, that Jesus Christ is God's final revelation but merely that "He is the One against whom we would measure any other reported experience--through all the centuries ahead, as to any other human life, or as to any life on any planet."<sup>4</sup>

This somewhat remarkable position in Christology (remarkable mainly because it comes from a Bishop within a church with a historically established reputation for orthodoxy and sensitivity in the area of Christology) is important because it reflects the distance away from Barth's Christology that

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<sup>1</sup>James A. Pike, A Time for Christian Candor (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

an emphasis upon the genuine humanity of Jesus can lead theology. The real antithesis between Bishop Pike and Barth is not due any more to Pike's alleged heresy<sup>1</sup> than to Barth's failure to grant sufficient genuineness to his interpretation of the humanity of Jesus.

For Barth, it is God who comes near in Jesus Christ. He is therefore not a mere representative, but God. "He has life in Himself (Jn. 5.26)," points out Barth, "and in His own omnipotence, on His own initiative, and on His own act, He is the same here and now as He was there and then: The Mediator between God and us men."<sup>2</sup> The witness to Jesus in the New Testament is a witness to the "Son of God," and therefore, "by nature God." Barth says:

We have to let go the whole New Testament witness step by step and turn it into its opposite if we read it as a documentation of "religious valuations," if we do not see and admit that step by step it relates to the being and revelation of this man in the unprecedented and quite unique determination of His existence.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Pike's interpretation of the major sources of christological heresies would in fact place Karl Barth's Christology under the heresy of Appollinarianism. Under this view Jesus equals God, but lacks a full human nature. While it would

<sup>1</sup>Alleged by his opponents, but it is important to remember that Bishop Pike has repeatedly been cleared of heresy charges within the Episcopal church, although the Bishop's council has censored him for "irresponsible statements."

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 314.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

appear that Barth has given a full and even exaggerated place for the human nature of Jesus, the definition and qualification Barth gives to the "humanity of God" definitely makes it suspect in this area. Appollinarianism was also characterized by its emphasis upon Jesus' individual manhood, including freedom of choice, but it also affirmed that ultimate ground is without reservation in him.<sup>1</sup> This, according to Pike, amounts to making Jesus God in his being and is an ontological denial of his manhood, a criticism he would make of Barth's Christology.

Bishop Pike's denial of the finality of Jesus as God's historical revelation is not a necessary conclusion to a real understanding of the humanity of Jesus, but it does reflect the inadvisability of establishing the manhood of Jesus apart from the revelation of God. This has always been the major paradox of Christian theology and remains in contemporary theology the key issue to the current christological debate. It again is marked by the temptations to either interpret the humanity of Jesus in such a way as to deny its genuineness, as Barth seems to do, or the efforts to interpret it in such a way as to deny the finality of that revelation as reflected by Pike's interpretation. Both interpretations help to lessen the paradox but in turn lose the full significance of the God-man that is declared in the New Testament. Neither view seems

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<sup>1</sup>Pike, Time for Christian Candor, p. 152.

to qualify as a truly dialectical view of Jesus Christ.

Pike's interpretation of the relationship between the humanity of Christ and his divinity, aside from his emphasis upon the relativity of the revelation, is in some ways similar to Donald Baillie's view (God Was in Christ). Baillie endeavors to maintain the full Christian paradox of the God-man, probably in contrast to Pike, but he is similar in seeing the uniqueness of Jesus in the form of a superior "reliance upon the grace of God."<sup>1</sup> Pike sees the humanity of Jesus as one which received and reflects divinity. He summarizes this view by saying:

So in the revelation in Jesus Christ the uniqueness lies not in the fact of revelation or in the Source of what is revealed, but rather in the avenue of that Source's revelation--at the right time the right man related aright to Him who is ever there and ready to be revealed. He was totally open to the Source, the Ultimate Ground of all that is.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the antithesis between Barth and Pike is clearly defined. For Barth, the uniqueness does lie in the fact of the revelation and specifically in the source of what is revealed. The revelation is for Barth the result of God's act and initiative and not some human response on the part of Jesus. But for Pike, and most of radical theology, God was revealed through Jesus because of Jesus' (the man) free human choice, and not the choice of God. Pike says,

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<sup>1</sup>Baillie, God Was in Christ, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Pike, Time for Christian Candor, pp. 112-13.

Here God was not being quixotic, special, miraculous, or supernatural, but was being himself--natural. Through the free choice of Jesus Christ (and if He was not free He was not a man) God could be truly Himself with men.<sup>1</sup>

If Bishop Pike is correct in maintaining that Jesus' response to God was one of free human choice, and that such freedom is necessary to his manhood, then both Barth and Pike face an unanswered problem. The problem for Barth is that of Jesus' free humanity. It would be difficult to believe that the kind of humanity Barth defines in the royal man would have or could have responded in any other way than to be the obedient, self-abased, and royal son of man. The freedom of a human response seems to be missing in this figure. Pike, on the other hand, has not answered the question of why this particular man, Jesus, by his human response was totally open to the source and ultimate ground of being. By admitting even to the degree of particularity that he does, Pike is faced in reverse fashion with the same basic problem of every orthodox expression of Christology. If the life of Jesus was one which by its free human response was totally open to God and thereby received and reflected divinity, one cannot help but inquire as to the source or cause for this uniqueness and difference in his humanity. It should be pointed out, however, that there are many who feel that the problem facing Pike's position (aside from his radical conclusions as to the relativity of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

Jesus) is closer to a real expression of Christology than Barth.

One must credit Barth with a genuine attempt at making theology relevant to the human situation even while questioning his success. His entire theological attempt in the Dogmatics is directed toward this end and is centered in Christology. Barth regards the relationship of the human and divine in Christ as the key to an understanding of the relationship of God to the world of man, as well as to the relationships between men. Barth means to include all of humanity into his christological exaltation, and says, "There is no human life which is not also . . . determined and characterized by the fact that it can take place only in this brotherhood."<sup>1</sup> Man as such becomes the brother of this one man. There took place uniquely in the existence of this royal man the union of God with our human existence.<sup>2</sup> If it is true that the basic essential of every theory of the Incarnation is that it reveal the seeking and encounter of the Divine-Thou with the human-I, then one must credit Barth with a majestic achievement in this regard, even while disagreeing with much of his interpretation.

Contemporary theology, even if it were to admit the accuracy of Barth's emphasis upon the divine side of the figure described as the royal man, would still ask the irresistible question, What kind of humanity is this? and Is this a real

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Incarnation? He is certainly the divine Lord, but is he really the servant and the son of man? Can this man be the man who was in "all things made like unto his brethren?"<sup>1</sup> Not according to Barth's own witness. Because he is the Son of God, and he had to be this to fulfil his role as man's reconciler, and because he was the revelation of God, and because he was Jesus Christ, he was more than a man.<sup>2</sup>

The strongest point that Gustaf Wingren makes in his criticism of Barth is to observe: "We find a line of thought in Barth which strongly emphasizes that the gulf between the divine and the human remains unbridged even after the Incarnation."<sup>3</sup> This is unquestionably the most sensitive element in Barth's entire teleological structure. Wingren denies that in Barth's view of the Incarnation, "God, one being, became man, the other being"<sup>4</sup> and says that "this does not happen in Barth's presentation of the Incarnation."<sup>5</sup> It seems that Barth is bound to the premise that God cannot cease to be God,<sup>6</sup> so that the Incarnation becomes an "appropriation" of himself to human existence, rather than an actual identification. Rather than God becoming man, man is invited to become God-like.

While this is the fundamental weakness, it is only one

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<sup>1</sup>Heb. 2:17.      <sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Wingren, Theology in Conflict, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 30.      <sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, pp. 158, 339ff.

of many problems and inconsistencies associated with Barth's view of the humanity of Jesus. It seems a contradiction, in the first place, to argue against the uniqueness of Jesus' historical personality by developing a unique concept of Christ's self-emptying. The contradiction develops when Barth creates a totally unique individual, even though his uniqueness is a negative factor. The fact that "He is in humility the highest"<sup>1</sup> makes his humanity unique when Barth's purpose is to deny that from the human side it was unique. There is a further inconsistency in relating this idea to the royal man as a christological figure who reflects a humanity superior to ordinary humanity. To say that this figure was as Barth describes him and then to deny that he was extraordinary or great is a contradiction.

There are two directions to Barth's refusal to show interest in the historical Jesus as a significant contribution to faith. The first reason is his belief that liberal theology had reduced Christology to nothing more than the historical Jesus. Its interest in him was limited to the historical. The consequence, according to Barth, was "the 'fairest Lord Jesus' of mysticism, the 'Saviour' of pietism, Jesus the teacher of wisdom and friend of man in the Enlightenment, Jesus the inner meaning of exalted humanity in Schleiermacher, Jesus as the embodiment of the idea of religion in Hegel and his

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Philippians, p. 62.



school, Jesus as a religious personality according to Carlyle's picture in the theology of outgoing 19th century."<sup>1</sup> In every case, it seemed to Barth that such a figure could only be a "relative Christ."<sup>2</sup> He joined with Strauss in questioning the sentimentality associated with the historical Jesus and says:

Is it not a fact that such a Christ can only be a helper of those in need, . . . who at best can only be related to a real, eternal revelation to mankind as a most high and perhaps ultimate symbol is related to the thing itself, who could on no account be the Word that became flesh, executing God's judgment . . . and challenging us . . . to make a decision.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that if this were the only alternative to Barth's interpretation, then his view would be superior. The weakness of faith resting solely upon a historical Jesus is, as articulated by J. B. Phillips, simply that "no figure in history, however splendid and memorable, can possibly satisfy the mind which is seeking the living contemporary God."<sup>4</sup> The challenge to Barth's interpretation comes, however, from a belief that it is not necessary to deny the ordinary quality of Jesus' humanity in order to preserve his deity. He can be the Son of God without Barth's effort to give content to his role as the Son of Man.

The other direction to Barth's hesitation in developing

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 387.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>4</sup>J. B. Phillips, Your God Is Too Small (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 26.

the full significance of Jesus' humanity in the act of reconciliation is the remarkable consistency of his emphasis upon divine sovereignty, which reflects itself in his refusal to view the humanity of Jesus apart from the resurrection faith. Barth emphasizes that the life of Jesus was a whole--the complete event of God. He admits that his view of the humanity of Jesus is colored by what he considers the necessity to look at this humanity from the standpoint of the resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

But even looking through the post-Easter event at the pre-Easter Jesus, has Barth given an accurate description of the humanity of Jesus? Is not there rather an unnecessary antipathy to the real nature of his humanity? Barth gives a curious explanation for having given the "unique distinctions of His historical appearance":<sup>2</sup>

When in the doctrine of reconciliation or dogmatics generally we come to this Christological center . . . , to protect us from having to look into the void, or at an unknown quantity, a mere symbol without content, when we speak of the Son of God who became the Son of Man. The name of Jesus Christ has on its human side the fulness which we have tried to envisage as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Barth seems obsessed with almost a phobia with regard to humanity as it relates to God. Why would the human side of Jesus be "void" or "symbol without content"?

Barth has apparently not found a way to interpret the act of God's revelation and reconciliation as being the work

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 248-50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

and act of God for man, and at the same time allowing God to be accommodated to the level of sinful, fallen humanity. In fairness to Barth, perhaps one should at least consider the heretical question, "Is it necessary that the humanity of Jesus be considered identical to that of all other men?" In fact, Barth would ask one to consider, is it possible that it ever could be considered identical? What about the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ that although he was a man, he was sinless and perfect? Do not the Gospels picture him as different from other men? "What manner of man is this, that even . . ."<sup>1</sup> "Never man spake like this man,"<sup>2</sup> and the response of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps then Barth has dared to interpret the humanity of Jesus in such a way as to show this uniqueness, and perhaps in this regard he is biblically correct, even if theologically wrong. Perhaps orthodox theology is wrong in insisting that the real humanity of Jesus be interpreted to mean humanity that is in every way parallel to our own.

One cannot avoid, however, the conclusion that Barth is still so committed to the awesome transcendence of God that he cannot look upon the real humanity of Jesus. Perhaps in

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 4:41.

<sup>2</sup>John 7:46.

<sup>3</sup>Matt. 16:16. It is often argued that the real humanity of Jesus is necessary to show that he really shared our existence, suffered as we suffer, and was tempted as we are tempted, but one must acknowledge the gospel witness to the difference of Jesus in each phase of his earthly existence.

viewing this humanity as a void or a "mere symbol without content," he has not fully appreciated how full and meaningful the real humanity could in and of itself be, without an interpretation of "unique distinctness." Barth's interpretation will leave the door open for the criticism as voiced by Donald Baillie that Barth wishes to escape the historical-critical problems that are imposed in attempting to understand and relate the human Jesus. Barth readily admits the historical difficulty in securing information about the human Jesus,<sup>1</sup> and he will inevitably be suspected of attempting to by-pass these problems.

A final word with regard to the danger that Barth's interpretation will miss the real human situation in that the royal man is in many ways a stranger to the human situation. How can he really be involved in man's history in the same way that man is? How much can secular man identify with this figure? There is an "over-powering" characteristic about the royal man that forces man by comparison to a place of helplessness and static response and confuses his responsibility. Barth's interpretation also takes away some of the strengths usually present in the traditional statement of Christology in that he sees little importance to the humanity of Jesus as far as its influence upon Christian faith. In considering the human side of the Incarnation as less than central in the

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 1, p. 188.

determination of man's salvation, Barth leaves theology open for the attempt of radical theology to fill this void with an over-emphasis upon the secular and the human. The vacuum created by Barth is partly responsible for the success of that theology.

## CHAPTER V

### EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It is possible that the history of theology in the twentieth century will be dated from the publication of Der Romerbrief by Karl Barth in 1918. Barth's position of leadership is to be observed from this point onward. The outstanding voices of the century before this date belong more to the spirit and climate of the nineteenth century than to the twentieth. The efforts to trace the developments within the twentieth century since Barth's initial influence is a more complicated problem and is not necessary for the purpose of the thesis, but no one would deny or ignore the important work being carried on apart from the theology of Karl Barth.

Contemporary theology in its major thrust, and certainly when independent of Karl Barth, is radical theology. Its major influence can be traced from Rudolf Karl Bultmann and in America the theology of Paul Tillich. If it were necessary, it would be possible to trace a discernible line of this theology, beginning with Bultmann and continuing through the post-Bultmannian school, including the work of

Ernst Kasemann, Ernst Fuchs, and Gunther Bornkamm,<sup>1</sup> and finding expression in even the most recent of contemporary theology. Such an attempt would be a complicated one, but it would reflect the Barthian emphasis, or a tension against it, within the mainstream of twentieth-century theology. The position taken by the thesis is that the theology of Karl Barth has an important relationship to even the newest and most radical forms of contemporary theology.

### Barth and Bultmann

Barth continues to see most of the forms of radical theology, including the demythologization of the New Testament by Bultmann, as a "highly impressive resumption of the theme and method of the type of theology fostered by Schleiermacher."<sup>2</sup> Barth says of Bultmann that his work has allowed him to examine and sharpen his own thinking in the same direction that he began with in his departure from the Schleiermacherian tradition. The new Barth is perhaps more charitable in his choice of words,

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<sup>1</sup>James M. Robinson regards Bultmann's theology as a new phase in post-war German theology and a second phase, "post-Bultmannian," the quest for the historical Jesus arising out of the theology of Bultmann, although critical of that theology. "It is based upon a thorough appreciation of the achievements of Bultmann's brilliant career," says Robinson, "and could not have taken place without those achievements." James M. Robinson, A New Quest, p. 12. Through the work of Ernst Kasemann and Ernst Fuchs, this new quest has given a relevance to Bultmann's theology to the most recent concerns.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 68.

but his conclusion is as always: He refuses to be led "anew into Egyptian or Babylonian captivity to a particular philosophy."<sup>1</sup> The important contribution Barth credits Bultmann with making is that of a warning that theology is not yet emancipated from its bondage.<sup>2</sup>

Bultmann has maintained throughout his attempts to "demythologize" (entmythologisieren) the New Testament, that his motive is to prepare the ground for the "paradox of a transcendent God present and active in history."<sup>3</sup> Barth has been free of many of the theological weaknesses in which Bultmann's demythologizing has involved him, but, because of his refusal to give expression to the philosophical implications of theology, Barth has at the same time lost some of the contemporary relevance inherent in Bultmann's theology. What Barth is decrying in Bultmann, however, is not philosophy as a system of expression<sup>4</sup> so much as a means of arriving at the truth. This is especially true with regard to his criticism

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>Rudolf Karl Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, ed. by H. W. Bartsch and trans. by R. H. Fuller (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>A great deal of what is "new" in Catholic theology is not so much new in the way of doctrine or truth; it is rather a new independence from the Thomistic-classical expression of theology. There is a new permissiveness that allows Catholic theologians to investigate and express the Catholic faith in new and creative philosophical methodologies. Notable among the newer expressions are the existential approaches of many contemporary Catholic theologians including the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar.



of Bultmann's methodology. Barth regards it as limited in its ability to find the truth, and his weakness really is in supposing that all philosophy is in fact assuming to arrive at truth by an independent process, when in truth much of philosophy has depended upon revelation of one kind or another to provide the material for its expression. Bultmann's attention toward the kerygma<sup>1</sup> deserves more credit than Barth allows.

Even after his change of direction, Barth is still to be regarded as the antithesis to Christian faith as an inner aspect of modern culture and theology an attempt to give that coherent expression. He parts company with Bultmann for this reason because he considers his work of demythologizing to be an integration with and at times an accommodation to man's culture and thus a servant of the human spirit. Barth repeatedly expresses appreciation for Bultmann, as he does for instance in the beginning of his christological discussion,<sup>2</sup> but says that "his hermeneutical suggestions can become binding on me only when I am convinced that by following them I would say the same things better and more freely. For the time being, I am not so convinced."<sup>3</sup> Barth confesses that in

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<sup>1</sup>See Rudolf Karl Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 83. One of the most important works by Bultmann toward understanding his position in this regard is Rudolf Karl Bultmann, Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting, trans. by R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), as well as Kerygma and Myth.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. ixff.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. x.

the development of his doctrine of reconciliation (more so, it appears, than in any of the earlier volumes of the Dogmatics), he has found himself in an intensive debate with the methodology and results of Bultmann's hermeneutical principle. He has chosen to ignore Bultmann in an effort to say freely what he perceived.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Torrance sees the theology of Bultmann as the antithesis to Barth's Christology and one that "reflects a horror for the notion of the being of God in space and time and therefore for the concrete act of God in the objective historical reality of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> The result, according to Torrance, is theology from a subjective basis rather than from within the object of faith and thus anthropocentric in character. As already noted, Barth himself has qualified the nature of the "objective historical reality of Jesus Christ" by his interpretation of the royal nature of Christ's historical existence, but there is the fundamental distinction between Barth and Bultmann that Torrance describes:

The way of Barth leads to the establishment of Christianity on its God-given foundations and to the pursuit of theology as a free science in its own right; the way of Bultmann leads to the dissolution of Christianity in secular culture and to the pursuit of theology as an expression of a reactionary, existentialist way of life.<sup>3</sup>

Torrance is of course in full sympathy with Barth's criticism

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Torrance, Karl Barth, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

of the Bultmannian approach, and the consequence of Bultmann's method is admittedly the loss of the Word-centered quality that is the strength of Barth's Christology, even though expressed in "space and time."

This distinction is a consistent feature between Barth and radical theology. It can be seen in the position as set forth by the Bishop of Woolwich, England, John A. T. Robinson, in the provocative book Honest to God. Bultmann's methodology is one of the influences observable in Robinson's Christology, and the consequence of this influence is Robinson's conclusion that "the entire conception of a supernatural order which invades and 'perforates' this one must be abandoned."<sup>1</sup> He answers the challenge from Barth that his position, in company with Bultmann, is anthropocentric in character by quoting Bultmann's reply to Barth: "I would heartily agree: I am trying to substitute anthropology for theology, for I am interpreting theological affirmations as assertions about human life."<sup>2</sup> Barth's criticism would be that both Robinson and Bultmann are attempting these affirmations about human life from human life, or from an anthropocentric center. Robinson is aware of this danger and seeks to avoid the complete loss of the transcendent, but he wants at the same time to make the transcendent

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<sup>1</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1963), p. 24. See also pp. 34ff, 44, 123.

<sup>2</sup>Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, p. 107. See also John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God, p. 50.

"existential" rather than "up there" or "out there."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson's attempt must of necessity be a subjective one, and Barth would deny the possibility of any success from this basis. His position would justify Barth's criticism because the transcendent reality Robinson concludes as God is to be found in the "depth of being"<sup>2</sup> in harmony with the theological ontology of Paul Tillich. It is clear that Robinson in adopting the Bultmann-Tillich approach is successful in making the transcendence of God an existential reality, but it is not clear that he has been successful in assuring its reality as the reality of God.

The antithesis between Barth and the Bultmannian approach in terms of subjective versus objective determination is therefore a correct one. For Barth, the objective reality of Christ's reconciliation, consistent with his concept of God and the Word, is conveyed in the term Stellvertretung (substitute). It embraces Barth's distinct interpretation of Christ as man's representative and substitution but in a way more completely than ever developed in conventional or traditional theology. It is in fact the key to Barth's doctrine of reconciliation and provides the harmony between the old and the new in his theology.

The development of Stellvertretung indicates the strict

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<sup>1</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God, pp. 51-56.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

theological and biblical approach that Barth prefers in contrast to the philosophical methodology of Bultmann and those who follow in this tradition. Barth's approach is to consider the objectivity of the Bible in terms of a scientific approach to theology, even though it is acknowledged as a theology of faith. It presents a clear and distinct choice between Barth and modern or radical theology. Stellvertretung is devoted to the complete life and work of Christ in man's behalf. It is the total and complete displacement of sinful man by the incarnate son<sup>1</sup> and is Barth's answer to Bultmann's demythologizing and reinterpretation of Christ's incarnation and reconciliation in terms of existential decision and timeless reenactment.

Professor Adolf Keller touched upon a very contemporary question with regard to Barthian theology when in 1933 he asked whether a pure theology of faith is possible as a "science." He wrote: "The question is whether the task of theology ought only to be that of preaching and affirming a creed or whether it ought also to extend to the intellectual and spiritual life in general."<sup>2</sup> Keller's emphasis was to note that ethics are to take place within culture and that we should see in culture the "material for expressing" our ethical powers.

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup>Adolf Keller, Karl Barth and Christian Unity, trans. by Manfred Manrodt (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 254.

Barth's rejection of any kind of theology of cultural synthesis in favor of a strict theology of revelation has always been his major difficulty in gaining acceptance and in communicating his ideas. His complete separation of God and man, while it was admitted for the purpose of dialectical discussion and as an antithesis for the basis of faith, was very early accompanied by a plea for a method of synthesis, demanded by the Incarnation, as a necessary complement.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1930 theology had begun to defend history and experience against their depreciation by Barth's theology, and this defense has reached the expression now observable in contemporary radical theology.

Keller's opinion in 1933 was that because Barth had postulated a "pure theology of faith," the Church Dogmatics had not been as effective as the Epistle to the Romans, saying simply that the prophetic element of Barth's message was more readily acceptable than his theological reformulations.<sup>2</sup> This assessment was obviously premature, as the Dogmatics were still incomplete and much of the richer theological contribution had not been written, but there are still many who would question Barth's theological statements while at the same time appreciating his restitution of the Reformation themes of sin and grace, the sovereignty of God, and the centrality of Jesus Christ. Professor Keller's summary of Barth is still relevant.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

He wrote:

Its final theological word has probably not yet been spoken. Yet the "theological word" is not its most profound concern but the Word of God to man which is spoken to us in Jesus Christ. The seriousness of this message, the helplessness in which it finds us, God's breaking into this human existence by judgment and grace, all this has found a new expression in theology. And this expression disturbs and awakens responsibility even where its theological forms are not acknowledged as final.<sup>1</sup>

Herbert Hartwell more recently raises similar questions with regard to the difficulty of conversation between Barth's dogmatics and any other religious view. He questions the apologetic value of Barth's dogmatics in the light of Barth's rejection of apologetics, and says:

It is difficult to see how the mind of modern man who, generally speaking, is no longer interested in religion can be reached by his teaching and how in particular agnostics and atheists who reject the premise of faith can be convinced of the truth of the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

This was the major point of discontent with regard to Barth's theology by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Contrary to widespread opinion, Bonhoeffer did not refute the theological foundations of Barth's theology. He accepted them and utilized them, but his criticism of Barth had to do with the difficulty of relating his theology to the "world come of age" (anticipating the "modern man" described by Hartwell and of great concern to all radical theology). Bonhoeffer says of Barth's difficulty in this area:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth, p. 184.

He called the God of Jesus Christ into the lists against religion. . . . That was and is his greatest service. . . . Through his later dogmatics, he enabled the Church to effect this distinction in principle all along the line. It was not that he subsequently, as is often claimed, failed in ethics, for his ethical observations--so far as he has made any--are just as significant as his dogmatic ones; it was that he gave no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics, on the non-religious interpretation of theological concepts. There lies his limitation, and because of it his theology of revelation becomes, positivist, a "positivism of revelation," as I put it.<sup>1</sup>

This phrase, "positivism of revelation," has become the rallying point for much of the criticism directed against Barth's theology<sup>2</sup> and may have been overly emphasized. Gerhard Ebeling, who is himself quite critical of Barth, is careful to point out that the postulation of a law of faith, "a tendency that is very much at work today in theology, and in the church,"<sup>3</sup> while it springs from the influence of Barth's theology, may be contrary to Barth's own intentions, "so that Bonhoeffer's verdict possibly does not affect Karl Barth himself."<sup>4</sup> It accurately defines, however, the direction of Bonhoeffer's criticism and serves as a reminder of the inherent weakness in Barth's dogmatism.

<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>See Regin Prenter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer und Karl Barth's Offenbarungspositivismus," Die mündige Welt III, pp. 12-21.

<sup>3</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1963), p. 99n.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-101.



Bonhoeffer's criticism of the traditional forms of Christian apologetics was to regard as "ignoble and un-Christian" its attack upon the adulthood of the world. He regarded this as a failure to understand Christ himself by traditional Christian theology. Edwin H. Robertson says, "The central question for him concerns the relation of Christ to the newly matured world."<sup>1</sup> This did not, as is often assumed, mean that Bonhoeffer had abandoned the supernatural aspects of Christology. His criticism of liberal theology is for this failure, and he regarded as Barth's greatest service the fact that "he called the God of Jesus Christ into the lists against religion."<sup>2</sup> He also rejects Tillich on the same premise, because in attempting to interpret the evolution of the world in a religious sense, "the world unseated him and went on by itself: he too sought to understand the world better than it understood itself."<sup>3</sup> The failure of Barth, according to Bonhoeffer, is not that his theology lacks a meaningful content, but simply that he failed to enable the church to discover a "non-religious interpretation for its theological concepts. This was his limitation."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Bonhoeffer goes on to add that the world needs to be understood better than it understands itself, "but not 'religiously,' as the religious socialists desired."

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Bultmann saw this same limitation in Barth and hence his efforts to demythologize. But he too is criticized by Bonhoeffer for "misconstruing the problem in terms of liberal theology,"<sup>1</sup> and falls into the condemnation of Barth's distinction between religion and Christ that Bonhoeffer clearly accepts. Bonhoeffer writes of Bultmann's demythologizing:

I am of the view that the full content, including the mythological concepts, must be maintained. The New Testament is not a mythological garbing of the universal truth; this mythology . . . is the thing itself--but the concepts must be interpreted in such a way as not to make religion a pre-condition of faith. . . . Not until that is achieved will, in my opinion, liberal theology be overcome.<sup>2</sup>

The important discovery to be made in Bonhoeffer's criticism is the one that allowed him to maintain the substance of revealed truth and still seek for a non-religious expression of that truth. He illustrates this in the varied and fragmentary remarks he made with regard to Bultmann's method of demythologization. He writes in another letter:

You cannot, as Bultmann imagines, separate God and miracles, but you do have to be able to interpret and proclaim both of them in a "non-religious" sense. Bultmann's approach is really at bottom the liberal one, whereas I seek to think theologically.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 110. Ebeling regards Bonhoeffer's remarks about Bultmann as containing "unquestionably . . . mistaken judgments." Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 103n. This of course is a judgment of its own; Bonhoeffer's remarks in this context may be of profound insight.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

The radical side of Bonhoeffer is his desire to be free of all religious conceptions, which he imagines as possible while still maintaining the reality of God and the truth of the gospels. The difference in Bonhoeffer's radicalism and that of contemporary theology is defined in what lies behind his desire to think theologically. This means for Bonhoeffer the acceptance and maintenance of God's reality and its relevance for modern man. He really seems to be charting a course that maintains the theological substance of Barth and searches for a new expression of the reality of God that he respects in Barth. He seeks to overcome the inherent weakness of liberal theology and sees Barth as still dominated by it in a negative fashion.<sup>1</sup>

In a sense, it is true even of Barth's theology that religion is a "pre-condition of faith," even though it is a religion of the revealed Word. Men must have some kind of pre-conditioning to believe and receive it. Bonhoeffer's concern was for the time when men would no longer have such a religious sense or interest. He was convinced that individualistic concern for personal salvation was no longer present in modern man, so that theology could no longer interpret in a religious sense. He believed that it would be possible to throw out altogether the religious language and concepts of the church and interpret the biblical message in such a way

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

as to be true to the revelation in the Bible and at the same time communicate with non-religious man. We are close to understanding Bonhoeffer when we listen to such words as these:

What is above the world is, in the gospel, intended to exist for this world--I mean that not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the Bible sense of the creation and of the Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

While it is clear that Bonhoeffer questions the durability of religion and even the church in its present form, as Edwin Robertson says,

Clearly, in his most radical statements about "religionless Christianity" he is most careful to preserve a clear Christology. It is the structures of religion that must go, not the proper consideration of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Whether Bonhoeffer would have been successful in maintaining the "Bible sense" of such realities as "creation . . . Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection,"<sup>3</sup> while interpreting them in a "non-religious" way, is an unanswered question.

### Barth and Culture

Barth's attempt, in contrast to Bultmann, Robinson, and radical theology in general, is to bring culture, man, and everything into the knowledge and event of the Incarnation so that everything is subservient to Christ. It is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 95.

similar to Bonhoeffer in its Christocentric basis but it differs in expression. Instead of theology being geared to civilization and its increasing secularization, it is geared to God's revelation in Christ and civilization is interpreted from this center. Jesus Christ is the revelation that God has acted on man's behalf. The coming of God is the event and act of God and it stands in a relationship to our own being and acts. "To put it in the simplest way," says Barth, "what unites God and us men is that He does not will to be God without us. . . . He does not allow His history to be His and ours, but causes them to take place as a common history."<sup>1</sup>

Because of this characteristic on the part of God, which is expressed in reconciliation and the humanity of God, nothing that is human can be irrelevant to God's witness. Barth's insistence that humanity as related to God in Jesus Christ is a fellow-humanity provides a firm theological basis for social responsibility on the part of both individual Christians and the church. Professor S. Paul Schilling says, "In view of his writings of the past several decades it is difficult to justify John Macquarrie's reference to Barth's 'apparent indifference to secular concerns,' or Reinhold Niebuhr's accusation that he is guilty of 'transcendental irresponsibility.'"<sup>2</sup> Schilling goes on to say that Barth actually calls

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Schilling, Contemporary Continental Theologians, p. 36.

for vigorous Christian action against social evil, although it is true that all such concerns are firmly grounded in his christological concentration.

Barth's use of the word culture covers what we would usually mean by both culture or civilization and humanism. It is this identification of civilization with a humanistic pursuit that is the cause for much of Barth's apparent coolness. He does see that the task of the Word of God is to realize the destiny of man, in his unity of soul and body, here on earth. In this sense, culture and the Word share in a common work. The proclamation of the gospel is in a sense a call to culture, but it is a new culture, and when Christian preaching is true to the Word, it has always met the old, or humanistic culture, with a sharp skepticism. John McConnachie sees this emphasis in Barth as declaring that "Christianity must ever be the crisis of culture."<sup>1</sup> Human culture has grown up in the chasm which has separated man from God and is permeated with falsehood. It is not God but a dangerously false God. There is a way in which Barth can be interpreted as one of the sources of radical theology in his denunciation of false gods. For Barth, the God who is the Lord of human culture is not God. "He is an idol. He is dead."<sup>2</sup> The God who is dead for radical theology, however, is of a different

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<sup>1</sup>McConnachie, Significance of Karl Barth, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

nature and is in reality the God whom Barth is affirming. Barth sees the necessity, however, of denying the false god of human culture in order for God himself, the real, the living God to appear to man. This is the crisis of Barth with culture.

While the success of Barth in leading the church back to its true mission of the proclamation of the Word is welcomed, he has opened himself to the criticism that his theology depreciates the ethical tasks of the church. While Barth has personally challenged this criticism by example,<sup>1</sup> his theology has not been a useful vehicle in communicating social and cultural ideas. There has never been any serious question concerning Barth's personal knowledge of the cultural world around him, but there are many who would question Georges Casalis' opinion that Barth expresses this knowledge in such a way as to achieve "unusual relevance."<sup>2</sup> Barth takes the world seriously. He regards the daily life of men, even outside the confines of the church, with concern. It is the place where Christ reigns invisibly and makes himself known. The church does not exist for itself but for the world. Barth's political writings, which are numerous, are evidence of his concern

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<sup>1</sup>Barth has always maintained that he is interested in two things: the Bible and real life. He sees the two as necessarily related. He means by real life, people and all their affairs. John D. Godsey is correct in stating of Barth, "For him political existence is part of theological existence." Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. 11.

for what happens in the city of man.

The criticism that since there is no path from culture to Christ, then there is no path from Christ to culture would be to deny the whole intent of Barth's theology. His undeniable postulation of the singularity of revealed knowledge is not intended to make conversation and understanding impossible between theology and culture. It does mean that such conversation and understanding must allow the Christian to rest his promise on the only one proper to theology---Jesus Christ.

Robert McAfee Brown correctly says of Barth:

What Barth seems determined to preserve in his constant interplay with the cultural forces around him is the right of the Christian to make judgments from within the purview of his Christian faith, rather than having to bracket his faith and think, speak and act from an alien viewpoint.<sup>1</sup>

This mutual respect is what Barth sees as lost in liberal theology, old and new, when the theologian feels obliged to sacrifice his own premise of faith in order to enter into conversation or communication with the world. Barth is merely asking why theology should feel it necessary to leave its own sphere of knowledge in order to speak. There is ample evidence within the Dogmatics of Barth's efforts to appropriate the creative contribution of culture.<sup>2</sup> The problem becomes

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. xix.

<sup>2</sup>The Dogmatics give evidence of Barth's efforts to face the scientific and philosophical views of theological issues before introducing an interpretation based upon the



one of language and communication.

Barth wants to establish that every grace that can be given to man is a participation in the unique grace of Christ. Man's endowment with grace is a reality, but it is at the same time a created reality as well as a historical reality. On this premise, to underestimate God's activity in any of the created world would be to do an injustice to God's majesty. So that, as in the humanity of Christ the redeeming love of God assumed a unique form, which as such is completely distinguishable from every other human form, so also the grace of the royal man should manifest itself in a unique way in his created world. This Christocentric vision can only be tenable and consistent, however, if it is thoroughly expressed as touching all of life, as indeed Barth intends that it should. The problem is the relationship between Barth's Christocentric vision and his restrictive concept of the sovereignty of God and revelation. This sometimes restrains the extension of his Christocentrism outside the church, when it should be expressed in all of life both in and out of the church.

Barth's theology will always be limited in its appeal to the world, and Daniel Jenkins is correct in observing that Barth's greatest service is in providing the basis for an

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Bible. See Barth, Dogmatics, III. 2, where after firmly establishing a christological basis for a doctrine of man, Barth examines what the anthropological sciences offer as corroborative material useful to the Christian. What is not so evident is examination by Barth of alternative interpretations in contrast to the Biblical view.

internal criticism of the Christian religion.<sup>1</sup> It has need of an expression that will find a hearing in the minds of secular men. Barth is content to let the revelation of God in Christ be self-authenticating. What is needed in his theology is a means whereby Christian faith in the commerce of culture and society can communicate with men. Divine grace is not communicated simply by declaring its existence in the manner of Barth's dogmatic, and its very declaration is judged by the world from its own secular perspective.

Barth must be willing to let revelation converse with the world. Jenkins points out that to listen to the voice of the world of religion and men does not detract from the finality of the Christian revelation.<sup>2</sup> The very fact of its finality in fact implies the need for man to be properly related to every human situation. This means for Jenkins:

No one can distinguish between faith and that which is not faith, on his part or on the part of his neighbor, until he has genuinely moved in alongside his neighbor with the humility of Christ and striven with him to perform the act of obedience which God seems to demand in that situation.<sup>3</sup>

Jenkins' plea is one for identification and is in the direction of Bonhoeffer's "non-religious Biblical concepts." It is a call for the sharing of the finality of revelation with the relativity of life, saying that the Christian should "stand alongside [them] in their religious situation,"<sup>4</sup> even while

<sup>1</sup>Jenkins, Beyond Religion, p. 30.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 32.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

concluding that Christianity is superior and the final revelation. How is the ultimate to stand alongside the relative? Barth says that the ultimate, meaning God's revelation in Christ, can stand alongside the relative, meaning any other religion or knowledge, only as the ultimate. Jenkins' attempt, in company with Bonhoeffer, is to avoid the false distinction that exists between the church and the world on the one hand, and to avoid on the other hand an inadequate concept of God and human finitude.

Both Bonhoeffer and Jenkins are pointing to a position that may offer a synthesis between the theology of Barth and contemporary radical theology. It is one which seeks to preserve, as Barth has done, the reality of God, and seeks, as Barth has not done, to make that reality understood in a non-religious sense. It also seeks to avoid the weakness of contemporary radical theology which is the tendency to lose sight of the unique reality of God in Jesus Christ. Jenkins shows this strength when he says:

God must be obeyed by seeing his will in terms of the situations in which men find themselves. Any action taken by men of faith must certainly be action taken in the light of the fact that the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is King over life.<sup>1</sup>

Jenkins notes that the use of the idea of a religionless Christianity includes "those who have been most vocal in asserting the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the revelation

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

of God in Christ,"<sup>1</sup> and further notes the wide spectrum between those who so use the term and those who wish the idea to mean a reckless freedom. He speaks of "the borderline between the genuinely self-critical attitude which is able to break through into true faith and the merely self-centered attitude which is more concerned with its own good opinion of itself than with the truth."<sup>2</sup>

Karl Barth is the acknowledged leader of those who are concerned with a critical theological evaluation of religion in the light of the Christian revelation.<sup>3</sup> His criticism of religion can never be separated from his attachment to the revelation of God in Christ as found in the scriptures. This is not true of radical theology. Its desire is to emphasize that faith does not mean primarily the development of a religious personality but obedience to God in action in the secular world in which men live. In developing this emphasis, however, it does so from a perspective free from the authority of scripture and revelation. The result is a challenge to traditional Christian interpretation not only in terms of the communication of its truth, but as to the substance of the truth as well.

Jenkins fails to note this difference and sees the distinction among those advocating a religionless Christianity

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, pp. 280-361.

as one of interest rather than a fundamental difference in attitude toward revelation. If he were correct, it would make the difference less significant, but what Jenkins does not observe is that in an effort to make faith a matter of obedience to God in the world, many theologians have separated faith from its source and show no concern for the reality that Barth makes as his primary concern. This is the liberal error that Barth's theology is most justified in correcting. It will become the condemnation of any religionless Christianity based on this premise.

Jenkins, in a manner parallel to Bonhoeffer, desires to reach into the secular world while at the same time keeping faith grounded in revelation. His attempt to express such a view reflects the difficulty of faith going "beyond religion" without going "beyond revelation." There is some inconsistency, for instance, between his emphasis upon the expression of man's faith in his coming of age and his willingness to accept Barth's emphasis upon the hiddenness of God,<sup>1</sup> which would seem to negate the initiative of man. Jenkins' position is summarized when he says:

It is only when the Church recognizes that faith lies beyond religion, as a gift, from the Godward side to man, which judges the religion of the Church as well as that

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<sup>1</sup>Barth's concept of the hiddenness of God is based upon God's perfection rather than man's incapacity, but it still requires God's initiative. See Barth, Dogmatics, II. 1, pp. 179-204.

of other communities . . . that it is in a position to use the only resources provided for it by its Lord.<sup>1</sup>

A central judgment in Jenkins' thought is that "the only way religion can be effectively criticized is from within,"<sup>2</sup> and he is willing to accept the strength of Barth's theology as providing such criticism. He thus endeavors to bring the two interpretations of religionless Christianity together: first, the need for an internal critique of religion from the point of view of faith, and second, the need to move beyond religion into faithful action in the midst of the present world.

It is possible, as Jenkins suggests, that Barth's approach may have more points of agreement, and possibly a common concern, with even some forms of the so-called non-religious interest in religionless Christianity than might at first observation be thought possible.<sup>3</sup> Barth's attack upon religion is considered by Jenkins to be not only an internal critique of the church in defining the singularity of faith but also an attempt to release men "for self-forgetful service of God's will in the real world."<sup>4</sup> Barth does not develop this in the manner of radical theology but he does show the need for "self-transcendence" and sees the church's deadliest foes as those of her own household.

The outstanding weakness in Jenkins' position (aside

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<sup>1</sup>Jenkins, Beyond Religion, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

from the fact that he tends to vacillate between the two views he discusses) is that he does not develop clearly the manner in which faith is to relate itself to the secular world. He reveals the heart of his concern for identification as a desire that faith be expressed "in love for our neighbor" as reflected in unselfish acts,<sup>1</sup> but he does not face up to the prior need for a meaningful definition of love that is adequate for both faith and the complex world of today. This is a characteristic failure of most of theology that would point in the general direction of society with an emphasis upon love for our neighbor, including the great work of Hans Urs von Balthasar. There is no argument with the plea but simply the need for further concrete development along the lines that will maintain relevance for both faith and action. The demanding nature of this challenge is admirably pointed up in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr<sup>2</sup> in showing the hypocrisy and paradox of both man and society. He points to the danger of oversimplifying love and morality and the need to insure against man's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 21. Jenkins reflects a characteristic ambiguity of trying to express Christianity in the world "come of age." The emphasis is upon man's relationship to his neighbor, a relationship of love, so that "faith is the recovery of our proper manhood, of our maturity. We 'come of age' and find our freedom from the bondage of false gods to hold communion in love with each other." Ibid., p. 49. "Faith expressing itself in love" is a vague concept, but it is a central theme in most of contemporary theology.

<sup>2</sup>Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, pp. 44ff. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, Pious and Secular America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).

unselfish acts serving selfish ends.

### Non-Religious Interpretation

Bonhoeffer differs from Barth in stressing with Jenkins that the only way to follow Jesus is by living in the world<sup>1</sup> and not by any degree of isolation or withdrawal from the world. It is this courageous confrontation with the world that is the secret to Bonhoeffer's mentality. The gospel and Christology cannot be isolated from man's existence in the real world around him. God cannot be wholly other; he must be wholly involved. The relationship to the world in which men live, however, a world which Bonhoeffer loved with a passionate concern, is possible only through Christ, the mediator. This is the real Bonhoeffer as opposed to the one imagined by some of radical theology. Following Jesus meant for Bonhoeffer more than simply living in the world. It meant adherence to Christ. He says, "When we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to His person."<sup>2</sup>

There is a fundamental difference between a "religionless" Christianity as envisioned by Bonhoeffer and the "godless" Christianity espoused by much of radical theology. Bonhoeffer joins Barth in a criticism of religion but he also holds a common desire with him not to sacrifice anything

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<sup>1</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, trans. by R. H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 51.



genuine in Christianity, including revelation, Christ, and resurrection. He is interested in freeing Christianity from the religious elements, meaning the unreal and unnecessary ones, but he does not define these from the same perspective as does radical theology. His criticism of Barth was that he seemed to be saying, "take it or leave it":

Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion, . . . but he set in its place the positivist doctrine of revelation which says in effect, "take it or leave it": . . . . That is not in accordance with the Bible. . . . The positivist doctrine of revelation makes it too easy for itself, setting up, as in the ultimate analysis it does, a law of faith, and mutilating what is, by the incarnation, a gift for us.<sup>1</sup>

The danger of this, adds Bonhoeffer, is that the world is left independent of God, shut off from revelation and left to its own devices.<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer's remarks were made without knowledge of Barth's most recent development of the Incarnation, but they are nonetheless a proper direction of criticism. They do not suggest, however, the abandonment of the doctrine of revelation per se, only the "positivist" expression of it.

Bonhoeffer's positive excelling over Barth is his

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Altizer believes we have arrived at a point in history where men are completely secular and have no need of God. Bonhoeffer sees man's coming of age but with the same basic need for God. This is another critical difference between Bonhoeffer and radical theology, so that it is not true that "the heart of Bonhoeffer's theology . . . is the same as the Christology of Hamilton, Altizer, and other radical thinkers today," as John Charles Cooper asserts. Cooper, Roots of Radical Theology, pp. 113-14.

desire and attempt to relate Christ the mediator in ways other than by a "positivism of revelation" to the secular world, and his superiority over radical theology is the understanding he shares with Barth that it is a genuine revelation which must be mediated to the world and not a mere human transcendence. This is the theological strength of both Bonhoeffer and Barth and what is missing in contemporary radical theology. Daniel Jenkins points out that the term "religionless Christianity" has become a catch-phrase that can easily be misinterpreted, and the most common misinterpretation is to ignore the christological framework of Bonhoeffer's theology.

Gerhard Ebeling acknowledges the centrality of Jesus Christ as the key to Bonhoeffer's theological outlook, although he interprets it as distinct from Barth's Christology. Without acknowledging the parallel, Ebeling approaches an accurate interpretation of Barth's own christological concentration when he interprets Bonhoeffer's christological emphasis to be the fact that God "is revealed . . . in Christ, to be our reality but therewith at the same time . . . also the reality of God,"<sup>1</sup> and "man becomes man . . . only 'before God,' and that means in the 'encounter with Jesus Christ.'"<sup>2</sup> The context is Bonhoeffer's, with its emphasis upon the "revelation of God's

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<sup>1</sup>Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 161. Ebeling notes that "the reproach of Christomonism made by Athaus against Barth would apply also to Bonhoeffer." Ibid., p. 106.

omnipotence" being the "participation in God's impotence in the world," and taking place within the process whereby the world came of age, but the christological framework is also Barth's, and they are remarkably similar.

Bonhoeffer's concern for and involvement in the secular world, in contrast to contemporary radical theology, was one that called for suffering and obedience. In contemporary theology, the call for identification with the secular is often an easy and shallow enthusiasm requiring only a mental discipline. Bonhoeffer would shrink from such an association and would regard it as a "proclamation of cheap grace" and the end of all discipleship.<sup>1</sup> We cannot enjoy a "direct relationship with men and things," writes Bonhoeffer, "This is what had hindered us from faith and obedience." "Since the coming of Christ, His followers have been unable to enjoy a direct relationship with any of these, whether they belong to history, nature or experience."<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer thus avoids the danger inherent in radical theology of equating God with the world and making impossible any distinction between the sacred and the profane or between good and evil.

Gerhard Ebeling sees the two sides to Bonhoeffer as phases in his development, and observes both "continuity and change" in his theology. Ebeling says this

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship, pp. 45-49.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

may well serve only to intensify our astonishment at the non-religious interpretation which in spite of everything is supposed to be still linked up with his Cost of Discipleship--and then surely also our astonishment at the Cost of Discipleship which in spite of everything is supposed to be heading towards the non-religious interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

If one can resist the temptation to oversimplify the changes in Bonhoeffer, and not reduce him to either a Barthian or a radical, then he will appreciate the unique strength of his contribution to theology.

It is possible to agree with Ebeling as to the complicated nature of Bonhoeffer's theological mentality, and even allow for the changes that are noted that leave "unresolved tensions,"<sup>2</sup> and still conclude that Bonhoeffer does not attempt to interpret Christology apart from man, but neither does he attempt to understand or interpret man apart from Christology. In this he reflects the strength of Barth's theology as opposed to radical theology. Ebeling concludes that the significant thing in Bonhoeffer is "his startling words about non-religious interpretation," and he does not adequately seek to interpret them from within the theological framework that was undeniably a part of Bonhoeffer's thinking. This does not make necessary a decision whether Bonhoeffer is "to be placed nearer Barth or nearer Bultmann,"<sup>3</sup> an issue which Ebeling regards as a false question. It is simply a matter of discovering the basis from

<sup>1</sup>Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

which Bonhoeffer's non-religious thinking is to proceed. The greatest weakness in Ebeling's interpretation is his desire to establish that Bonhoeffer's work was to proceed "on the heritage of liberal theology,"<sup>1</sup> in spite of Bonhoeffer's own remarks to the contrary.<sup>2</sup>

Bonhoeffer provides a needful criticism of Barth in his understanding that God is made manifest in the world as well as in the church and in the same way--as the crucified one,<sup>3</sup> the one who loves and is "the man for others." Radical theology is saying much more than this, however, and at times something contrary to this. It proposes to ask with Bonhoeffer, "What is Christ for us today?"<sup>4</sup> as for example John Robinson does, but its answer leaves many of the fundamentals of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 104, 104n.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 109. Most of radical theology imagines itself in the tradition of Bonhoeffer, who has become for them "the symbol of the radically serious Christian thought of our time." Cooper, Roots of Radical Theology, p. 113. This theology looks only to the radical questioning in Bonhoeffer and shows no interest in the real faith in God that must be appreciated if he is to be understood. Modern theology is often guilty of quoting Bonhoeffer out of context and thus losing sight of his refusal to cast aside the anchors of his faith. Ronald Gregor Smith points out that part of the fascination toward Bonhoeffer is due to the complications within the man and the very ambiguity of his life and thought. This is perhaps an important clue to the attachment modern theologians feel toward Bonhoeffer, coming at a time of both theological and personal complications. See Ronald Gregor Smith, ed., I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trans. by Käthe Gregor Smith (London: Collins Press, 1966), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship, pp. 342, 344.

<sup>4</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God, pp. 70-78.

Bonhoeffer's theology and goes on to speak of abstractions: Robinson's interpretation of Bonhoeffer's "experience of transcendence" is to say:

Jesus is 'the man for others,' the one in whom Love has completely taken over, the one who is utterly open to, and united with, the Ground of his being. And this 'life for others, through participation in the Being of God,' is transcendence. For at this point, of love 'to the uttermost,' we encounter God, the ultimate 'depth' of our being, the unconditional in the conditioned. . . . Because Christ was utterly and completely 'the man for others,' because he was love, he was 'one with the Father,' because 'God is love.' But for this very reason he was most entirely man, the son of man, the servant of the Lord. He was indeed 'one of us.'<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis in Robinson is that Jesus was the Son of God, or "one with the Father," because he was the man for others. He brings this quality of God to man, but it is a quality that after all is in all of us as the ground of our being. The emphasis in Bonhoeffer, and it is a critical difference, is that Jesus is the man for others because of his participation in the Being of God. He was divinely determined. One also can experience "a new life for others," but only through faith which is "participation in this Being of Jesus (incarnation, cross and resurrection)."<sup>2</sup> His emphasis is upon the unique Being of Jesus who makes this participation possible. It is an exciting reinterpretation of transcendence, but it retains the singular source and distinct identity of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 165.

Bonhoeffer writes:

Our relationship to God is not a religious relationship to a supreme Being, absolute in power and goodness, which is a spurious conception of transcendence, but a new life for others, through participation in the Being of God. The transcendence consists not in tasks beyond our scope and power, but in the nearest thing to hand.<sup>1</sup>

The unfinished theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers direction for Barth at three important points: first of all, in giving greater human significance over Barth's problematic anthropology. He does this by emphasizing Jesus Christ as the border of man's existence. He thus gives meaning to temporal existence and does not minimize humanity in its present form. He says, "Christ is Christ not as Christ in Himself, but in His relation to me. His being Christ is His being pro me."<sup>2</sup> This is very close to what Barth is saying in the theme of the humanity of God, but Bonhoeffer has succeeded to a greater degree in making the existence of Christ meaningful from within humanity. His theology, like Barth's, is Christocentric, but it does not remain only Christocentric. It becomes anthropocentric in a way that satisfies the need for historical-human relevance that has been observed and criticized in Barth's theology throughout the thesis.

Both Barth and Bonhoeffer see man's true humanity to be found in Christ. Bonhoeffer sees man's lost image as restored in Christ in a way comparable to Barth but with a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 47.

greater emphasis upon humanity as those in whom the restoration is realized. He writes:

In the Incarnation the whole human race recovers the dignity of the image of God. Henceforth, any attack even on the least of men is an attack on Christ, who took the form of man, and in His own Person restored the image of God in all that bears a human form. Through fellowship and communion with the Incarnate Lord, we recover our true humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Bonhoeffer retains the strength of Barth's Christology even while taking it a step further in a more positive interpretation of humanity. He is still much closer to what Barth is saying than what radical theology means by "the man for others."

When Bonhoeffer speaks of Christ, he is speaking of the man for others, but as the only man whose being for others is of ultimate significance. Christ is for me, but as Edwin Robertson says:

This is not the idealist's attempt to describe Christ as the center of my being, which really means that the human personality is the highest expression of man and his point of contact with God. One does not therefore reason from human experience to Christ, but the other way. Christ interprets our being. We discover our humanity in Him.<sup>2</sup>

Robertson points out that this christological concept is a permanent part of Bonhoeffer's thinking and is necessary to any proper understanding of such phrases as "the man for others" and "man come of age."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Robertson also interprets Bonhoeffer's Christology as necessary to "correct the false impression of



Bonhoeffer's hesitancy to answer the question of what is the real nature of Christ is not that he desires to limit him to the level of humanity but simply that too often the theologian's discussion of what Christ is has fallen into an unwholesome and improper question of how? He says:

The Christological question is fundamentally an ontological question. Its aim is to work out the ontological structure of the "Who?" without coming to grief on the Scylla of the question "How?" or the Charybdis of the question of the "fact" of revelation.<sup>1</sup>

Bonhoeffer sees no positive gain in such speculative inquiries, because, "If I know who the person is who does this I will also know what he does."<sup>2</sup> He prefers for men to confront Christ in the reality of his being rather than seeking to categorize Christ as to nature and quality of Being. He says, "Christ is present in the church as a person,"<sup>3</sup> and, "Christology primarily seeks His being and not His action . . . the subject of Christology is the personal structure of being of the whole, historical Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

Bonhoeffer's superiority over Barth is to see the need for an existential understanding of Christ in appreciation for both the importance of humanity and the vicarious quality of his being. His emphasis is,

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Bonhoeffer as the apostle of the 'dying church' or the advocate of 'religionless Christianity.'" Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

Christ can never be thought of in His being in Himself, but only in His relationship to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be conceived of existentially, viz. in the community.<sup>1</sup>

While Barth has humanity as a primary concern of Christology, even the "humanity of God" seems at times to be a "being in himself," and lacks the convincing emphasis of Bonhoeffer that he is "for me" and has a "relationship to me."

A necessary observation with this difference is to admit to a certain strength in Barth's respect for the real distance between God and man that neither Bonhoeffer in his respect for the "maturity of the world" nor Robinson, for example, in his concept of "progress" have appreciated. Bonhoeffer comes nearer to preserving this strength than does Robinson and radical theology. The "this-worldly" transcendence of Bonhoeffer is much more related to the God of the Word than the human transcendence of Robinson.

The second direction that Bonhoeffer offers to Barth is one that closely parallels his theology but adds an extra dimension to human history. It is Bonhoeffer's understanding of Jesus Christ as the center and meaning of history. Theology is not a mere subjective, personal experience. Jesus Christ is in history, but this includes for both Bonhoeffer and Barth more than the Jesus of history akin to modern radical theology. It includes the full biblical meaning of Christ,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

who interprets history and man and gives history its meaning and hope. Bonhoeffer writes: "The historical interpretation of the New Testament can justifiably be pursued only after serious consideration of the presupposition that Jesus is proclaimed Kyrios Christos."<sup>1</sup> Barth has said much the same thing, and the superior direction of Bonhoeffer's thought is that after so proclaiming Jesus as King and Lord, he does enhance man's history as man's history and not at a level of history removed from ordinary humanity. It is Barth's interpretation of Christ-centered history that Bonhoeffer improves upon.

In Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth, a view of revelation is positivist if it blatantly disregards the relationship of God to the world as Creator to creation, including the "non-religious" created world.<sup>2</sup> Barth does not do this, but neither does he allow the Creator's relationship to the creature to extend to the level of the creature, even in the Incarnation. Much of the criticism against Barth is his failure to reflect in his theology a direct encounter with the problem of history. His effort to do so is the motive behind the doctrine of reconciliation and the humanity of God, but even here the problem of the "outsider" is prominent. The relationship between God and the world is treated within his christological framework,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, pp. 91-92.

whereas Bonhoeffer shows a willingness to confront the secular world on its own terms.<sup>1</sup>

Barth believes that Bonhoeffer and those who think along these lines have reformulated the liberal demand for a synthesis between a philosophical world view and Christian doctrine. It is important to note, however, that Bonhoeffer also refutes the liberal attempt,<sup>2</sup> but he correctly sees that it was the liberal endeavor itself and not possible merits within that was to be avoided. Bonhoeffer has clearly adopted the Barthian lesson that no theology can address the world without first giving attention to a doctrine of God as he reveals himself from outside of man. It does not follow, however, that the created world remains outside of theology's

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<sup>1</sup>Barth addresses this question in a long footnote in Volume IV, Part 3 of the Dogmatics and criticizes the view represented by Bonhoeffer, saying simply that if the church is to serve the world she must guard her boundaries and remain the church. She can only move into the world as the representative of Christ. See Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 21-38. Barth sees the challenge of moving through the frontier between the church and the world, or between the sacred and the secular but says that those who regard this challenge as "a call to obedience, should certainly realise that in the removal of the inner frontier we have an intimation and preparation for the crossing of the outer, and therefore an indication to the Church to take up its prophetic office." Ibid., p. 35. He remains true to his original premise and endeavor--the authority of the revealed Word as seen in Christ. He summarizes the entire direction of modern theology as a trend to "show that dogmatics is challenged, not merely by the underlying reality and scripture, but by the progress of Church history, to pay particular attention to the character of reconciliation as revelation." Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 109.

concern, nor that in turning toward humanity and its problems theology must forsake the revelation of God. For Bonhoeffer, man's own history and culture is enriched in the fact that Christ is the center and meaning of that history.

Although Barth does not accomplish it, his Christocentric view seems quite capable of harmony with a truly Incarnational view of life, and it may be that his inclusion of all of life in the Christ event makes his view of natural theology no longer valid. God is now related to men in the closest way possible. The Incarnation means that no man is really without God. If Godlessness is an "ontological impossibility," as Barth says, then man is by his very existence included in the event, even when not aware of it. This would seem to indicate that there is no such thing as a totally "natural man." No man is left wholly to himself and to his own unaided intellectual and spiritual resources. If this is the case, then the ground for Barth's rejection of natural theology has been destroyed in the same fashion that the "abyss" separating man and God has been crossed by the God-man. Barth continues to speak of those who are outside the circle and ministry of God's Word,<sup>1</sup> but, on Barth's own Incarnational premise, it can be questioned whether any man is really outside that circle.

Can it ever be made tenable that there are no persons

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 112-13.

who have any knowledge of God, true knowledge, without the conscious knowledge of Jesus Christ? And is it possible to conclude that all knowledge about God that does not come through the conscious knowledge of Jesus Christ is false knowledge, or knowledge resting upon human resource alone? It would be safer to say that such knowledge is itself a gift of God's prevenient grace, or perhaps a remnant of the imago dei, distorted but not destroyed. It would seem more consistent with Barth's incarnational principle to conclude that man's quest for God, however misguided and misinformed---as could be admitted with regard to nineteenth-century liberalism---is nevertheless a response to the prior action of God in him. The truth thus granted him would not then result from his own unaided efforts but from human life and thought which at every point are dependent upon the self-disclosing action of God.

Barth's Christocentric view of man does support an increasingly positive attitude toward human culture and has developed at least in part as a result of the criticism toward his alleged cultural unconcern. Barth is able to find now real continuity for instance between Greek-heathen and Christian humanism and sees in all culture opportunities for the fulfillment of the gifts of God. He has always evidenced great appreciation for the arts and especially deep understanding and esteem for the music of Mozart. Because of God's reconciliation of the world through Jesus Christ, "the world and every man has

. . . received a new and positive determination."<sup>1</sup>

Barth's new interest and emphasis upon the church is to extend its concerns toward the world. Christian existence is much more than the pro me of Barth's Christology.<sup>2</sup> The reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ is to call man into life with himself and at the same time life within the church, "the living community of the Lord Jesus Christ." The church is responsible for the ministry of the Word; it is to proclaim Jesus Christ and the covenant of God as fulfilled in him as the ultimate meaning of man's history and cause men to see that the future manifestation of Christ is already their ground of hope.<sup>3</sup> Barth criticizes the classical definitions of the church for their lack of a basic responsibility for the world outside. The true community of Christ, like its Lord, is sent into the world, and exists for the world, and is to confess him before the world.<sup>4</sup> It is thus summoned to responsible social action of which Barth's own life is a personal example.

The third direction that Bonhoeffer points Barth toward is a more effective means of communication with the world. Bonhoeffer is agreed with Barth that Christianity must shake off its confinement to false idols and express itself in genuine fashion, but beyond this they disagree as to the manner of this

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 300.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 567-68.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 681, 729, 759.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 764-68, 773-74, 780, 786-90, 800.

communication. Barth does not share with Bonhoeffer the sense of a loss of relevance and meaning in the traditional language and thought forms of Christianity. Bonhoeffer sees this as the fundamental crisis of the church and his desire to speak to the world without religion goes beyond even the Christocentric language and ideas of Barth's most recent theology.

Barth sees the task of Christian communication as one whereby the elect joyfully shares the message of God's election of all men. The fact that God has declared himself for the Christian is based on the larger premise that God has declared himself for all men and not just those in the church. This is the real contribution that Barth makes to Christology. It is the comprehensive scope of his view of reconciliation that takes the sting out of an otherwise narrow view of revelation. The task of the elect is to effect what Barth calls "frontier crossings"<sup>1</sup> between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. He gives a lengthy treatment to the responsibility of believers to carry on an authentic dialogue with non-Christians and in this context shows the parallel between the history of the elect and that of mankind. Barth says:

If we know the Incarnation of the eternal Word and the glorification of humanity in Him, we cannot pass by any other man, without asking whether in his humanity he does not have this mission to us, he does not become to us this compassionate neighbor.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, II. 2, pp. 410-19, 449-58.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, p. 426.



One can appreciate Barth's interpretation of humanity's relationship to itself and still observe that he has left a problem in the area of Christian communication that Bonhoeffer and radical theology are both correct in seeking to overcome. If men are not prepared to accept the presuppositions on which Barth's theology is based (and if it was obvious to Bonhoeffer in 1944 that they were not, it is even more obvious today), then how far can Barth's approach succeed in making contact with such men? Is it not true that men must already believe before they are prepared to listen to Barth? If so, then his theology can be a source of truth only to those already committed and thus to those who need it least. It is difficult to avoid such a conclusion. Until one stands within the circle of faith, wide as it is, he is not able to hear, and Barth's theology becomes one to the "elite."<sup>1</sup> It may be that those who stand outside the circle of Barthian described knowledge and faith, and outside the church, will have to be spoken to and enticed with a language and even concepts less pure and perhaps more secular than that of Barth's theology. It may also be that natural theology will play a useful apologetic role in this endeavor.

Barth admits that God can speak his Word to man in a different way from the actual proclamation of the church

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<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xlii.

when and where it pleases him,<sup>1</sup> but he sees this as not the proper concern of the church. His warning is to let God be concerned with these other means and let men be concerned with what has been proclaimed in the proclamation of the Word to the church, in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is really the heart of Barth's criticism toward the theology of Paul Tillich and the key to the distinction between them. Barth's criticism of Tillich is that he does not make as his first concern the message of the biblical revelation.<sup>2</sup> It is this message that Barth sees as the church's commission, and the proclamation of that message is to be consistent with the biblical witness.

Barth's criticism of Tillich is probably an accurate reflection of his attitude toward the renewed interest in the cultural concerns of modern theology. He says:

Since Tillich's theological answers are not only taken from the Bible, but with equal emphasis from church history, the history of culture generally, and the history of religion--and above all, since their meaning and placement is dependent upon their relation to philosophical questions--could not these answers be taken as philosophy just as well as (or better than?) they could be taken as theology?<sup>3</sup>

Barth further expresses the fear that Tillich may have lost the "biblical content" (and thus to Barth the only real worth)

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Doctrines, I. 1, p. 59.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Alexander J. McKelway, The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich. A Review and Analysis (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 13.

of his theological answers by his scheme of presentation. He sees Tillich returning to the absolute image of man who "knows which questions to ask, anticipating their correctness, and thereby already in possession of the answers and their consequences."<sup>1</sup> Barth's argument is as always:

Should not the theological answers be considered as more fundamental than the philosophical questions and as essentially superior to them? If they were so considered, then the question and answer would proceed, not from a philosophically understood subject to a "divine" object, rather from a theologically understood object (as the true Subject) to the human subject, and thus from Spirit to life, and from the kingdom of God to history.<sup>2</sup>

Barth does recognize in the secular sphere the existence of "true words" which agree with the one Word proclaimed by the Bible and can be materially tested by it, although of a different order. Jesus Christ is sovereign over the periphery as well as the center of the revelation in the Word. Thus we may expect some attestations of his Lordship which are not alien to his revelation but to a degree illumine it and make it more concretely evident. Such words are only true however as they point to their origin in Jesus Christ and to the extent that he declares himself in them, and they are seen to be true only in the light of faith from him.<sup>3</sup> It seems evident

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. This would be for Barth an application of what he considers the superior concept of "covenant" to Tillich's concept of correlation.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 3, pp. 115, 122-25, 130, 163-64.

that in the task of the proclamation of the gospel, Barth chooses either to ignore or not to see many of the problems that are the heart of radical theology's concern toward modern man.

### The Church

Ebeling says Bonhoeffer's passion for making the proclamation of the church concrete and understandable "runs like a red thread through the whole of Bonhoeffer's theological existence."<sup>1</sup> It was this concern which led him to question the church and seek a "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts."<sup>2</sup> For Barth, the question of authority in the church is that of its faithfulness and identity with Jesus Christ as declared in the Bible. For Bonhoeffer, the question of authority in the church is the question of its proclamation being concrete, understood, and relevant.<sup>3</sup> He says:

I can be addressed with authority only when a word spoken out of deepest knowledge of my humanity affects me in my whole reality here and now. Every other word is impotence. The church's word to the world must therefore come to deepest knowledge of the world and affect it in its whole present reality, if it seeks to be authoritative.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the message of the revealed Word is not automatically authoritative for Bonhoeffer. It is only so if it

<sup>1</sup>Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 285. See also pp. 120-22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-161. <sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 284-86.

<sup>4</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gesammelte Schriften, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (München: Chris Kaiser, 1958), pp. 144ff. Quoted by Ebeling, ibid.

understands the world to whom it speaks. Barth tends to think and speak of the Word as authoritative per se, with no need to reinterpret or acknowledge the problem of communication.

Barth is interested in the question of authority in the church,<sup>1</sup> and it is a major issue in his dialogue with Roman Catholic theologians. But the authority for which he strives is the authority inherent in the Word, without reinterpretation. He considers the importance of both the church and scripture and follows a more or less traditional Protestant view that while we must view scripture through the church, in the end it is scripture that becomes the final appeal.<sup>2</sup> The norm which judges every issue judges also the church, holy scripture.<sup>3</sup> But even so Barth is careful to respect the church, and it is not a mere "notion" from scripture that allows one to disagree with the church but an obligation imposed upon us by the Word.

Bonhoeffer's concern for the authority of the church's proclamation was not only that it be concrete and understandable, but he was equally concerned with reality. It is this concern which keeps him distinct from much of contemporary radical theology and also reflects his difference with the

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<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, pp. 538-660.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Credo, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

theology of Karl Barth. Both men are passionately concerned with reality, but this interest in reality took Barth deeper and deeper into the revealed Word, and this in company with the church, while for Bonhoeffer it seemed to bring him closer to the world.<sup>1</sup> Ebeling points out that Bonhoeffer "laboured to overcome the fateful habit of thinking in two spheres which separates the world of religion from the rest of reality."<sup>2</sup> This led him to criticize the church, but always as one who was devoted to the church. Ebeling says of this: "But the expressions of extreme joy in the church and those of extreme criticism of the church spring, as it seems to me, from a single basic impulse which is maintained amid every change: faith has to do with reality."<sup>3</sup> What seems to be paradox is really therefore the unique strength of Bonhoeffer's concern. It was a desire to maintain reality within the church, using it as the criteria for both criticism and the defense of the church's mission and role.

Bonhoeffer differed from Barth in his view of the church, but it is significant to see their parallel interest in the church, even while noting this difference. Ebeling

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<sup>1</sup>Barth makes a significant statement in his report to Christian Century in 1938 in which he describes his new "christological concentration." He says that along with this change in his theology, he has become "simultaneously, very much more churchly and very much more worldly." Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 44. It is the "churchly" aspect of Barth's thought that is to be seen in the Church Dogmatics, and after all, this work is a churchly endeavor.

<sup>2</sup>Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 283.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

calls attention to the central place that the church played in Bonhoeffer's life, saying that "this life was entirely dedicated to the church," and "the existence of the church determined his existence."<sup>1</sup> In a manner akin to Kierkegaard, it was Bonhoeffer's passion for the church that caused him to criticize it so severely.

From a somewhat different basis, Barth has a parallel discontent with the institutional form of religion (Vereinswesen) to that of Bonhoeffer and radical theology. Barth was questioning in 1924 the whole structure of the institutional church with its social gospel, church activity, institutional enterprises, ethical efforts, all of which were in his mind "missing the point"<sup>2</sup>—the point being man's real existential situation and need. The basic difference in Barth's criticism was that he was questioning the church's secularization, and radical theology is questioning if the church is secular enough.

The church is not an institution in Barth's theology, a place for the conservation or defense of moral and spiritual values, but it is a witnessing people whose responsibility is to make the good news of the kingdom of God heard in the world. If the church corrupts this message, it corrupts itself. When the church in any age is true to its message, it is relevant and vital and is truly the church. The church is constantly being judged and is becoming the church in the light of that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Word of God, p. 20.

judgment. The task of theology is to constantly call and restore the church to its proper role by means of the biblical revelation.

This is the basis of Barth's paradoxical conclusion that "the gospel is the abolition of the church, just as the church is the abolition of the gospel,"<sup>1</sup> and this is precisely why man must not withdraw himself from the church. The awareness of our human limitations takes place within the church which must also be aware of its limitation and thus "to become profoundly conscious within the church of one's lack of God."<sup>2</sup> It is within the church, however its frailty and failure, that man's hope is realized, and this is the central development in Barth's concept of the church.

It could be considered a summary of what Barth is attempting to do is to require theology simply to listen afresh to scripture in the life of the church. It was out of his original discovery of the significance of revelation and the Bible's message that the church acquired a new meaning for Barth as the place where Jesus Christ is proclaimed. The church is not the building of the kingdom by human endeavor, for it is not we who build his kingdom. God does this through his Word. But for the church to fulfill this role, it needs theology. It needs a theology which has also acquired a new meaning in that it speaks the message of the Living God.

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<sup>1</sup>Willems, Karl Barth, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Theology is therefore not an independent science. It operates in service to the church.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever Christ is present the church exists. Wherever men are in Christ the church exists. This leads Barth to conclude that in this sense there is no salvation outside the church.<sup>2</sup> The church is a community of believers.<sup>3</sup> To belong to Christ is to belong to all those who are in Christ, that is the church. This "incarnational" view of the church seems to be another reason for Barth's popularity among Roman Catholic theologians, many of whom do not consider such a view as challenging the institutional concept of the church, but rather see it as similar to Catholic ecclesiology.<sup>4</sup> Barth emphasizes the necessity of God's action in calling the community together, and the mystery and grace within the church does not depend upon the activity of man, including his religious acts, such as baptism and faith,<sup>5</sup> but on the sovereign grace of God as it

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<sup>1</sup>This emphasis by Barth has made a contribution to Protestant theology that Professor Torrance says can only be compared to the Reformation. See Torrance, Karl Barth, pp. 202-3.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Doctrines, I. 2, p. 228. As a safeguard to any idea that Barth's new view of the church is a renunciation of his early theology, he continues to insist that the church, like the humanity of Christ, is a sign, and we are ultimately dealing with an act of God. God remains the familiar sovereign Lord of early Barthian theology, and the church is an instrument in his hand. Ibid., pp. 245-48.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>4</sup>Willems, Karl Barth, p. 101. See also Kung, Justification, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, Doctrines, IV. 1, pp. 769-79.

comes to us in Christ. The Roman Catholic criticism of Barth in this regard serves to indicate the consistency of his position: "Barth seems compelled by a kind of phobia especially not to give too much honor to a creature at the expense of the Sovereign God."<sup>1</sup> Many Protestants would admit to this same phobia and resist it for different reasons. The Catholic objection is to the denial by Barth of the per se role of the Roman Catholic Church ecclesiology as a sacrament. Willems' comment is that "in spite of the happy introduction of the concept 'sacrament,' the work of salvation remains in the end always a continually renewed Divine intervention from above."<sup>2</sup> Another Catholic commentator criticizes Barth at this point for a kind of "theological occasionalism," and "to put it more factually, Barth has never completely repudiated himself."<sup>3</sup>

Barth rejects all concepts, whether Catholic or Protestant, which imply an autonomous self-glorification of the church. If he is correct in saying that all of creation and creation activity must be seen through the person of Christ, then it is possible to see the church in its human form as also transformed and having a "realized potential" in the light of the unique humanity of Jesus. As the royal man was uniquely endowed with grace, so the church has been endowed and is thus not to be depreciated.

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<sup>1</sup>Willems, Karl Barth, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

The early period of Barth's ecclesiology is marked by the church being seen mainly on the side of promise and not fulfillment. The more recent ideas expressed by Barth reflect his Christocentric unity and synthesis. In Christ, God's grace has become an earthly reality; in him the redeeming love of God has taken the appearance of a "created objectivity."<sup>1</sup> The consequence of this is, for the church, a new role in regard to the sacraments. Barth says, "The church is the one particular spot which corresponds to the particularity of the Incarnation. . . . That is why in the concept of the church we had to insist so strongly upon the objective sacramental element."<sup>2</sup> The remaining emphasis is the relationship between the Word and the sacraments. Barth would still maintain that "not in the sacrament is true objectivity contained, but in the scriptures, in Christ,"<sup>3</sup> and,

Both the sacrament and the sermon are event. The two must not be separated. Baptism and Holy Communion are in their way proclamations of the Word; so, on the contrary, the sermon is also something done. We must learn to understand anew this mutual relationship.<sup>4</sup>

This interpretation and emphasis upon the church and the sacraments is the real contrast between Barth and

<sup>1</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, II. 1, pp. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, I. 2, p. 247. Part four of Volume IV, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, was to have dealt with the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and would have reflected an even greater emphasis on the sacramental role of the church. See Barth, How I Changed My Mind, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Barth, Credo, p. 199.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

contemporary radical theology. As modern theology turns more and more away from the church and toward the world, Barth turns increasingly toward the church and makes his greatest contribution in that direction. Georges Casalis says of this:

If Otto Dibelius is right in his assertion that the twentieth century will have been for Protestantism "the century of the church," in the theological realm this will have been underscored decisively by the work of Karl Barth and his Dogmatics in particular.<sup>1</sup>

### The Holy Spirit

It is significant to realize that contemporary radical theology has arisen immediately after the great sweeping movement of the theology of transcendence as led by Karl Barth. It repeats the words and thoughts of radicals like Marx and Nietzsche, but contrary to these men, it is a voice within the church. Its positive worth is that it directs attention to the lack of reality in many of our religious affirmations and boldly calls dead what has been so for a very long time but has been nurtured as real. Theology does not need anything less than real to maintain its relevance. Barth has called theology and the church back to that reality and believes that the answer is a return to God in his self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Professor J. Rodman Williams says the problem with Barth's theology is that of making relevant its concept of

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<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. 81.

God. It is this problem toward which radical theology has addressed itself. There is obviously a breakdown in the communication of God's reality to man. God is not being experienced by modern man. Whatever his limited knowledge of God may be, it is below the level of his experience of the realities around him. It may be that modern man has missed the mark in endeavoring to experience God in the same way that he experiences other realities, but even so, this becomes part of the challenge to theology. The resulting phenomenon in the professing church is for Christians themselves to go through the motions of faith after the reality has disappeared. It is the remarkable frankness of radical theology that it sees the problem of the loss of God as one within the church as well as society.

Barth's position in maintaining the primary responsibility of theology as one of faithful proclamation of God's Word and deed, whatever society's response, does not take seriously enough the real problems of a "god-less society," nor does it endeavor sufficiently to come to grips with the seriousness of the church's problem in a world come of age. In other words, Barth does not show sufficient concern to the radical and real change in the secular world and to the lack of influence made by the church upon that world.

The weakness of contemporary radical theology is that after a courageous attempt to define as dead the

irrelevant and meaningless concepts within theology, it does not offer a superior concept or expression in their place. What it does present is little improvement, if that, over the work of more skillful men in the nineteenth century. It is really a new liberalism, contemporary in its language, but old-fashioned in its substance. It reaches out into the world of man's secular in toto, with no really qualifying standard<sup>1</sup> and hails it as the realm of the divine. It does, however, address itself to a contemporary problem and shows the characteristic courage of liberalism in every period. It is this liberal strength that Barth's theology must learn to appreciate and appropriate.

The great Swiss psychologist, C. G. Jung, sounded a prophetic note when he wrote:

Christian civilization has proved hallow to a terrifying degree: it is all veneer, but the inner man has remained untouched and therefore unchanged . . . everything is to be found outside--in image and in word, in Church and Bible--but never inside. . . . Too few people have experienced the divine image as the innermost possession of their souls. Christ only meets them from without, never from within the soul; that is why dark paganism still reigns there, a paganism which . . . is swamping the world of so-called Christian culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The "qualifying standard" presented by radical theology is usually an ambiguous chorus of love for our neighbor after the example of Jesus, "the man for others," which usually fails to give any concrete definition of love and is therefore unqualified. Many of these theologians have not appreciated the lessons of man's own history which should convince him that the only way he can love without confusion is through a directive which transcends his limited knowledge.

<sup>2</sup>Carl G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 11-12.

The need, then, for both theology and human existence is for the reality of God as proclaimed by Barth's theology to become an inward possession of the soul. To do this it will be necessary to overcome the challenge as outlined by contemporary radical theology, the challenge of the world which imagines it can live without God. Theology's attempt to meet this challenge will undoubtedly take the form of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Barth himself has only pointed in this direction but has admitted the need for such an attempt. The concluding volume of the Church Dogmatics, which was to have moved into this area, will never be written, and there is only a fragmentary contribution in this area from Karl Barth.

Professor Williams expresses the belief that "we stand on the verge of a new theological era" that could be as profound and as exciting as anything that has happened in the history of theology. "The focus of the new era will be the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> He sees the "painful period" of our empty awareness as possibly a preparation for this new era that will lead into the deeper levels of existence, made possible by the Holy Spirit. Nicolas Berdyaev two decades ago saw that the hope for Christianity lay in "a religion of the Holy Spirit," saying:

In a certain sense it may be said that Christianity,

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<sup>1</sup>J. Rodman Williams, "A New Theological Era," Austin Seminary Bulletin, Faculty Edition, LXXXII, No. 3 (November, 1966), 37.

historical Christianity, is coming to an end, and that a rebirth is to be looked for only from a religion of the Holy Spirit which will bring Christianity itself to birth again.<sup>1</sup>

Barth points to this new direction for theology in one of the most difficult sections of the Dogmatics. It is his discussion of "The Sanctification of Man"<sup>2</sup> where he wrestles with the mystery and miracle of the Holy Spirit. His effort is to establish a link between the exaltation accomplished for man in Christ and man's participation in this exaltation and sanctification in both the community of the church and as individuals. The realization of man's new possibility, that of union with Jesus Christ, is the work of the Holy Spirit: "When we receive Him we receive Him from Jesus Christ, as His Spirit. And we enter into the sphere of His presence and action and lordship."<sup>3</sup> Barth says further:

In the sphere of earthly and human history the problem of the history between the man Jesus and other men is the proper form of the problem of distance and confrontation, of encounter and partnership. . . . If the solution to this problem is the intervention and presence and action of the Holy Spirit . . . then this means that we are summoned to understand it as a problem spiritually, i.e., in the light of its solution in the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in complete consistency with his theological premise, Barth says it is not a human problem but a divine problem,

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, The Divine and the Human, trans. by R. M. French (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 2, pp. 499-598.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 342.



"the problem of God's own being, and the answer and solution in and with which, by His own personal intervention in the Holy Spirit, He also answers and solves our problem."<sup>1</sup> He also says, "The Holy Spirit is not a magical third between Jesus and us. God Himself acts in His own most proper cause when in the Holy Spirit He mediates between the man Jesus and other men."<sup>2</sup> The key phrase is Barth's reference to "a problem of God Himself,"<sup>3</sup> which means it can only be posed and answered in relationship to God.

In Barth's development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, he relates it to the atonement as both a divine act and offer and also an active human participation in it.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit becomes his answer to the subjective realization of the atonement. It is the Holy Spirit in man that makes possible the human participation in God's revelation; it is his human response to God.<sup>5</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit takes the form of a human activity<sup>6</sup> in the community of faith, or the church. This is the extent to which Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is allowed to involve itself in man's world. It reflects the same limitation as does his theology as a whole, and while Barth desires that theology confront the world of man's secular concerns, he does not accomplish this

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 343.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>4</sup>Barth, Dogmatics, IV. 1, pp. 642-43.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 643.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 643-50.

even in his treatment of the Holy Spirit.

Barth thus reflects the direction that his theology would have taken in developing a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He has shown an increasingly important place for the church, including its ecclesiology which is grounded in Christology. In company with a renewed emphasis upon the sacraments, his doctrine of the Holy Spirit would have moved in this direction. Barth reflects in the most recent volumes of the Dogmatics an increasing appreciation for the church as the place where Jesus Christ is proclaimed and also the community where the Holy Spirit is at work. The interest of radical theology, in the tradition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is in the direction of the secular world, and its doctrine of the Holy Spirit, if it had one, would no doubt be in that direction, as it probably should.

Barth has modified his early dialectical emphasis, repudiated the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man, abandoned his existential orientation, and adopted an affirmative view of man. He has shown the strength of the pilgrim theology that he advocates as open to new understanding of divine revelation. He continues to maintain the sovereign act of God in grace as he did in judgment and the primacy of the divine initiative in revelation and salvation. Man's response, repentance and faith, are a result of the prior action of God. Behind every volume is an attempt to

understand what the relation of man and creation is to God. Barth's contribution to contemporary theology is this comprehensive concern and courageous attempt, however one views his success. B. A. Willems says:

All over the world, the renewal of theology is in full swing. Zealous historians are finding that concepts that were anchored in theology are changeable and not binding: exegetes repeatedly force the dogmatists who were accustomed to quietude to energetic activity; patrologists are rehabilitating people who for the sake of an unsparing clarity had been registered as heretics. If in this boisterous activity one wants to keep alive the intuitive knowledge of what an authentic theologian really is, contact with a man of Barth's stature and manner can be of great significance.<sup>1</sup>

This tribute by a Roman Catholic scholar is indicative of the fact that Roman Catholic circles have discovered Barth and give him a hearing probably never before given a Protestant theologian. Barth will remain in the future history of theology as the one who rediscovered the message of the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ and caused the church to listen to that message at a crucial moment in its life. He has made an inestimable contribution in calling a halt to anthropocentric theology, setting the burning question of the absolute transcendence of God again in the center of theological thought, restoring revelation to its rightful place. He has called theology anew to the Word of God, demanding obedience and reverence. It is as Robert McAfee Brown says:

Whether one likes Barth's theology or not, he possesses

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<sup>1</sup>Willems, Karl Barth, p. 118.

major stature among Christian thinkers, and subsequent theology, whether following him or departing from him, can never again proceed without taking him into account. One can responsibly disagree with Barth; one cannot responsibly ignore him.<sup>1</sup>

It is fitting that Barth himself should have the last word in an examination of his theology. He gave the following remarks in response to questions and criticism of his theology that in some ways paralleled those made throughout the thesis. His response was:

You may rest assured that I have a little experience of my own. I am a modern man also, and I stand in the midst of this age too. I see its problems, as do others. . . . And I assure you, exactly in life, exactly because I was called to live in a modern world, did I choose the path of which you have heard me speak.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, p. xii.

<sup>2</sup>Barth, God in Action, p. 133.

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THE HUMANITY OF GOD: KARL BARTH AND  
CONTEMPORARY RADICAL THEOLOGY

Ronald Douglas McConnell  
The University of Glasgow

ABSTRACT

The research of the thesis is directed toward the Christology of Karl Barth as being that area of his thought which most nearly relates to the contemporary concerns of theology. It is focused on what Barth considers a new direction for his theology. Barth's christological position can be regarded as a recent one, but, because Christology is central to his theology, it touches everything he has written. It is given a complete discussion in the Church Dogmatics. The thesis evaluates this discussion in the light of contemporary theology.

The terminology used by Barth for his recent interest is die menschlichkeit Gottes, "the humanity of God," and indicates that his emphasis in the Incarnation is upon the God-ward side. Even so, because it concerns itself with the relating of God to man, it has an important affinity with contemporary theological interest in the doctrines of man and society and the pointing towards a new theology of the Holy Spirit. The position taken by the thesis is that Barth's contribution in the area of Christology provides the natural foundation and heritage upon which the new theological quest will be based. It is possible to say that the present trends in theology would not be possible without the work of Karl Barth.

Chapter one is a summary of Barth's criticism of the theology of the nineteenth century. It includes an examination of his theological

anthropology in contrast to the image of the absolute man in nineteenth-century theology; his postulation of the Word of God as the source of authority as opposed to religious immanentism; his tension with the historical emphasis in nineteenth-century theology and the consequent problem for Barth of a proper relationship between faith and history; and the question of theology's legitimate concern with philosophy and man's prevailing world-view.

Chapter two is a critical analysis of Barth's early theological emphasis upon the transcendence and otherness of God. It seeks to understand while criticizing his rejection of natural theology and man's ability to know God apart from the revealed Word. It examines Barth's hermeneutical principle as it is reflected in his thorough and consistent regard for the sovereignty of God. The position of Hans Urs von Balthasar is examined with regard to his doctrine of man and natural theology as a critical contrast to Barth's limitation of man's role in the revelatory process.

Chapter three examines the heart of Barth's Christology as it inquires critically into his doctrine of Reconciliation and the comprehensive scope given by Barth to Christology and the Incarnation. It is this emphasis which marks Barth's greatest contribution to theology and takes the sting out of an otherwise too narrow view of revelation. The total sweep of Barth's Christology gives it a triumphant note but leaves him with the problems of sin and evil and an unsatisfactory answer to the question of apokatastasis and universal salvation.

Chapter four inquires into the problem of the humanity of Jesus. Barth's concept of the royal man is examined as an interpretation which

identifies man's humanity with that of Jesus but which introduces a new dimension to human nature as seen in the God-man. Many of the key problems of Barth's theology come to light in this critical area of his interpretation. Barth's concept of the humanity of Jesus as viewed through the royal man is evaluated in contrast to that of contemporary radical theology.

Chapter five summarizes the key points of emphasis in Barth's theology as they relate to contemporary radical theology, including culture, the church, and the Holy Spirit. The thesis endeavors to appreciate the strength of radical theology as a corrective to Barthian weaknesses and at the same time recognize a fundamental theological superiority in Barth. Attention is given to the unfinished theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as providing a possible synthesis between Barth and contemporary radical theology. The research of the thesis indicates the probable direction for contemporary theology in arriving at the possibility and the need for a new theology of the Holy Spirit.